

Outlaws

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13384656) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13384656>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	M/M , Multi
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter , Bedelia Du Maurier/Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham , Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham's Parents , Abigail Hobbs , Winston (Hannibal) , Lady Murasaki (Hannibal Rising) , Bedelia Du Maurier
Additional Tags:	they're 18 and up , Not Underage , Explicit Sexual Content , Graphic Sex , Fluff , Fluff and Smut , Smut , Teenagers , Hannigram - Freeform , Teen Will , Teen Hannibal , Young Will Graham , Young Hannibal Lecter , Suburbia , Hannibal is Not a Cannibal
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2018-01-15 Completed: 2020-08-23 Words: 36,441 Chapters: 15/15

Outlaws

by [FlannelEpicurean](#)

Summary

18-year-old Will Graham is facing the prospect of another dull and lonely summer break, until a beautiful young stranger comes to stay in the house next door. His name is Hannibal Lecter, and he's about to turn Will's world upside-down.

Meeting

Will crosses the threshold into his room and drops his book bag to the floor. Tumbles onto the bed. Watches the clock, for want of anything better to do at the moment.

Summer vacation.

He should be happy, he supposes. Classes are over. He's free from the inane dramas of his classmates for a few months. His eighteenth birthday has just passed. He'll start work at the animal shelter in a few days. All reasons to be elated. But he can't muster any enthusiasm.

He wishes Alana hadn't moved away.

He pulls his phone from his pocket. Considers texting her. But a twinge in his gut stays his hand. Things had gotten so awkward between them, there at the end. And he hadn't talked to her since. What would he say? How could he expect to simply pick back up now, after all this time? He heaves a sigh. Tosses his phone onto the bed. Closes his eyes.

He wakes at the sound of a light knock on the door frame. His mother, standing there smiling. "Welcome home!" she chirps. "Last day of school. How was it?"

Will shrugs.

She rolls her eyes, still smiling, and comes over to sit on the bed.

"Sweetie," she says, "you can't mope around this summer. Not like you did last year."

"Mom, I'm not moping," Will protests, rubbing his eyes.

She sighs. "Well, whatever you call it, you can't do it all summer. Come on," she gives his leg a playful swat with the back of her hand. "Why don't you take Winston out for a walk?"

Will sits up. "Okay," he says, his tone guarded. Spending time with his dog is a panacea. Will knows his mother knows this. To seem too excited now would be as good as admitting that he was in a mood in the first place. He gets up from the bed, doesn't pull away from his mother as she pats his shoulder.

"Don't be too long," she calls after him; "it's almost time for dinner."

"Yeah," Will answers, already headed down the stairs. He stops by the front door, pulls on his sneakers, grabs the dog's leash from its hook. "Winston!" he calls. The dog comes bounding around the corner, dashes a quick circle around Will's legs, then sits obediently while Will fastens the leash. "Okay, come on, boy."

Will pushes open the front door and steps out, lets Winston trot ahead a few paces, shuts the door behind him. They jog down the front steps, down the path across the lawn, out to the sidewalk. Will begins a brisk, steady pace that lets Winston not-quite-run. But instead of

settling into the pace as he always does, the dog pulls up short with a little “woof.” Will looks down at his dog, puzzled, then up to where Winston is looking, ears pert.

And there, standing in the driveway next door, is a young man Will has never seen before.

He is all long, lean lines—chiseled cheekbones, shapely nose, graceful limbs and elegant hands. Will does not yet know enough to think of the young man’s clothes as exquisitely tailored; he only knows he feels shabby by comparison. The young man flicks a lock of sandy hair away from his face and turns his dark eyes on Will.

He is beautiful. That is the only word Will can think of. Will’s mouth and hands go slack, and the leash slips from his fingers.

Winston chooses that moment to become unruly, bounding toward the young man with typical canine joy. Will shoots out a hand, calling, “Winston! No!” and stumbles after the dog.

The ghost of a smile plays across the beautiful stranger’s features as the dog spins a tight circle and then darts behind him. Will pulls up short, unwilling to push past the young man, unable to approach any closer for fear of...what? Breaching the zone of easy confidence surrounding this stranger? Stumbling in front of him? Encouraging Winston into further antics? Anxiety fills his mind with a thousand terrible scenarios, any one of which would cause him to die of shame.

“Sorry,” Will stammers, unable to meet those dark eyes, “I’m sorry, he’s...” Winston yips excitedly from his place behind the young man and wags his tail. “He’s not normally like this,” Will apologizes, his face going bright red.

The young man rotates a fraction and gives Winston a serene smile. “Will it encourage him to be bad if I pet him?” His voice is smooth, accented. Something European, Will thinks. His ear can’t place it.

“Uh,” Will shakes his head a little, coming back to himself. “Uh, yeah, it’s better not to pet him when he’s acting up. It rewards the behavior.”

The beautiful stranger turns back to Will. “Then I’ll refrain.” He steps to the side. Winston stays where he is, wagging his tail.

“Winston,” Will calls, snapping his fingers. “Come on. Come here.” This time, the dog obeys, trotting over to Will’s side and looking up lovingly. Will shakes his head and takes up the leash again, firmly this time. Chances a peek over at the young man. “Sorry,” he says again.

“It’s not a problem,” the young man says. Still standing there, completely unruffled.

A silence spins out into the space between them, feeling awkward to Will, but clearly not bothering the beautiful stranger at all.

“So,” the young man says. “You live here?” He inclines his head a few degrees, toward Will’s house.

“I, uh. Yeah. Yeah, I live,” Will points over his shoulder at his house, kicking himself for sounding stupid.

The young man smiles. “Then we’ll be neighbors. For the summer, anyway.”

Will begins to feel dizzy. “Oh. You’re. You live here, too?”

He nods. “I’m staying with my aunt for the summer.” He nods to the house next to Will’s. To Ms. Murasaki’s house. The sweet Japanese lady who has lived next to Will ever since Alana’s family moved away.

“Your...aunt?” Will squints at the young man. Nothing about him looks Japanese.

As if reading Will’s thoughts, the young man says, “Not by blood. But dear to me nonetheless.”

The way he talks is strange to Will, pleasantly so, out of reach in some way. Will knows the word *refined*, but cannot seem to grasp it and hold it still when confronted with the personification of the concept. “Oh,” he says. *Stupid, stupid.*

The beautiful stranger extends one elegant hand. “I’m Hannibal Lecter,” he says.

Will can’t keep his hand from shaking a little; he hopes his palm is not too damp. “Will. Will Graham.” Winston gives a cheery little bark, as if by way of introducing himself. “Oh. And this is Winston.”

Hannibal nods. “Hello, Winston.”

Will suddenly realizes that he still has Hannibal’s hand in his grip. He fumbles away from the handshake and reaches down to scratch Winston behind the ear. Feeling soothed by the contact with his dog, he regains some composure and asks, “So you’re staying here for the summer? Where, uh. Where are you from?”

Hannibal’s mouth quirks. “From a boarding school that caters to wayward boys such as myself. We had a falling-out, and it was decided that I should spend some time away, reflecting on my crimes.”

Like a book, Will thinks. He talks like a book. And this tidbit he’s just tossed out—is this sketch of an adventure story true? Or is he teasing Will?

Before he can ask anything further, the shrill voice of his little sister hollers out from the front door, “Will! Mom says come in for dinner!”

“I’ll be right there, Abby!” Will shouts back, annoyed. To Hannibal he says, “Sorry, I gotta go.”

Hannibal nods his permission. “Until next time, then.”

“C’mon, Winston,” Will says. He and the dog trot back to the front door. Will opens the door and lets Winston in, then turns back for just a moment, for just one more glimpse at the beautiful young man next door. But the driveway is empty already.

“Will,” Abby says, snapping him back to reality. “Mom says close the door, you’ll let bugs in.”

“I’m not,” Will begins to argue. Shakes his head. Steps over the threshold and shuts the door behind him. Abby has lost interest in him and gone into the dining room, where she has begun to regale their parents with stories of the last day of school, and of her impending bright future at camp after camp for the duration of the summer. Will drifts in after her and takes his place at the table. His parents smile acknowledgement of his presence, but don’t interrupt his little sister, even as they begin to serve out the food.

Will fills his plate. Begins slowly eating. Nods when he’s supposed to. Answers when he’s spoken to. Lets Abby take the spotlight, as he so often does. Sits patiently through the meal. Helps his mother put away the leftovers and get the dishes into the dishwasher, much to her delight. Leaves the kitchen and climbs the stairs, stalks down the hall to his bedroom. Closes the door. Stands in a shaft of evening light.

Thinks, *Hannibal*.

The next afternoon, the doorbell sounds just as Will passes by on his way to the kitchen. He stops short, surprised. Steps to the door and opens it. Stands rooted to the spot, dumbstruck.

“Hello,” Hannibal says.

“Hi,” Will stammers.

“May I come in?”

“Um, sure.” Will opens the door wide, steps back. Hannibal glides in, stands just a foot or two beyond Will, not presuming to go any further into Will’s home.

“Our meeting yesterday was so brief, I thought I would come and make a more proper introduction.”

“Oh,” Will says. “Okay.”

Will’s mother appears from around the corner, calling, “Will? Who’s at the door?” She stops short when she sees Hannibal. “Oh. Who’s this?”

“Mom, this is Hannibal,” Will answers. “He’s staying next door this summer.”

Hannibal extends his hand, and Will’s mother takes it. Hannibal bows slightly as he shakes her hand. “Hannibal Lecter,” he elaborates. “You must be Mrs. Graham.”

“Yes,” Will’s mother says, giving Hannibal a charmed smile. “You’re staying with Ms. Murasaki?”

Hannibal nods, withdraws his hand. “You might call her my aunt; she was instrumental in raising me, and we have a very close bond. I’m on holiday from university, so we’ve arranged that I shall spend the summer here.” He gestures to Will. “Your son and I met yesterday evening, by way of Winston.”

“Oh, how nice,” Mrs. Graham beams.

Will ducks his head. “Well, actually, Winston was being kind of bad,” he admits. “He...got away from me and ran up to Hannibal.”

“He didn’t jump on you or anything, did he?” Mrs. Graham asks, aghast.

Hannibal shakes his head. “He caused me no distress, Mrs. Graham. On the contrary, I will admit I found him somewhat amusing.” He gives a slight smile. “Though I fear that was at Will’s expense.”

“Well, so long as you’re all right.”

“Perfectly fine,” Hannibal affirms.

Mrs. Graham cocks her head. “We’re about to start lunch. Do you want to join us? So we can welcome you to the neighborhood properly?”

Hannibal smiles. “I would enjoy that very much, thank you.”

Mrs. Graham turns toward the kitchen, beckoning for the boys to follow. “Come on in,” she invites. “Oh. Hannibal, are you vegetarian or anything?”

“I am a happy omnivore, Mrs. Graham,” Hannibal answers. “May I be of any help in preparing?”

Mrs. Graham turns her charmed smile on him again. “How thoughtful of you! Can I put you and Will in charge of the salad?”

“Of course,” Hannibal answers.

“Sure,” Will agrees.

Will can’t keep his eyes off of Hannibal, all during lunch. Hannibal’s movements are so elegant, his voice so refined as he regales Will’s family with tales of his pre-medicine studies in Europe (putting the lie to his earlier claim of a boarding school for wayward boys—Will feels foolish now for having considered it even a candidate for the truth), of his travels, of his utterly fantastic-sounding life.

And Hannibal eats like some kind of graceful bird, taking perfectly-sized bites and chewing almost daintily, never speaking with his mouth full. Will feels like a wild boar by comparison. He begins taking smaller bites of his food.

“So you’re essentially house-sitting?” Will’s father asks.

Hannibal gives a tiny nod. “You might call it that. My aunt will be traveling on business quite a lot, to be sure. But we will also see plenty of each other.” He smiles. “She is not abandoning me entirely.”

“Well,” Will’s mother suggests, “if you get lonely, maybe you and Will could hang out.”

Will almost drops his fork. “Uh, sure,” he agrees, and hopes his face has not gone too red.

Hannibal turns his gaze on Will, paralyzing him instantly. “I would like that very much.”

“Yeah, maybe Will could take you down to the animal shelter, too,” Will’s father adds. “If you like animals, that is. They’re always looking for volunteers. Something to do, if you’re interested.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Hannibal returns. To Will, “Perhaps we can make arrangements after lunch?”

Before Will can answer, Abby pipes up, “I’m going to riding camp.”

Hannibal turns to her, beaming. “Oh?”

Abby nods vigorously. “With real horses and everything.”

“Well, real *ponies*, anyway,” Will’s father says.

“I would love to hear more, Abigail,” Hannibal invites.

“It’s Abby,” Abby corrects.

Her mother leans toward her. “Abby, don’t be rude.”

“What?” Abby protests.

“No offense taken,” Hannibal assures Mrs. Graham. “And none given, I hope. My apologies, Abby.”

“It’s okay,” she chirps.

The tension broken, Abby begins pouring out her hopes for what riding camp will be like. Hannibal listens intently, giving her the same attentive respect he has shown for her parents. Will watches, fascinated, and feels an unfamiliar emotion begin to blossom. He knows he wants to—has to—be friends with Hannibal, but there is something deeper. He wants Hannibal to approve of him, somehow. He wants desperately to please Hannibal, in any way he can.

When there is a lull in the conversation with Abby, Hannibal turns to Will. “We should exchange mobile numbers,” he suggests.

“Oh, um. Yeah.” Will pulls out his phone, managing not to fumble it too badly.

Hannibal presents an upturned hand. “May I?” Will gives over his phone, thrilling as his hand brushes Hannibal’s. Hannibal enters his information into Will’s phone and hands it back. “There,” he says with a slim smile, “now you will be able to reach me, and we can spend some more time together.”

“Yeah,” Will agrees, “sounds great.” He looks down to his phone, texts Hannibal, *Hey it’s Will Graham*.

Hannibal pulls a slender, clearly brand-new device from the inner pocket of his elegant jacket and spends a moment saving Will’s information. Gives Will another smile. “And now I will be able to reach you.” His keen gaze spears Will, makes him feel as though something else lurks behind those words, makes him think of razor-beaked birds and great, sharp-clawed cats.

A little shiver races up Will’s spine. He feels as though he’s just sold his soul, for something rich enough that he doesn’t mind being damned.

Gifts

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will spend some time together at a farmer's market and the park. Will's interest in Hannibal deepens.

Saturday breakfast in the Graham house is a lively affair. Will's parents dance around each other in the kitchen, cooking as a team. Will's father scrambles eggs and fries bacon while his mother cuts up fruit and brews coffee. They both keep an eye on the oven timer as the aroma of cinnamon rolls fills the whole house. Will keeps Abby and Winston entertained and out of the way.

Will accepts a cup of coffee from his mother. Abby helps her set the table. The timer goes off, and Will's father takes the cinnamon rolls from the oven. "All right," he says, "let's eat!" They take turns filling their plates, and take their places at the breakfast table.

"Great job on the eggs, hon," Will's mother says, smiling at her husband.

He mimes tipping a hat. "Thank you, thank you. And my compliments on the fruit salad."

Will's mother holds up a finger. "Mm. Speaking of fruit salad, we should go to the farmer's market today. We're out of strawberries."

Will's father nods his agreement. "And we should see about some eggs while we're there. How 'bout it, kids? Who's up for a trip to the market?"

"Ooh, me!" Abby raises her hand high. "Can we get peach ice cream?"

"I second that," Will's mother says.

"Done and done." Will's father turns to him and asks, "Any special requests?"

Will shrugs, his mouth full of cinnamon roll.

"Oh," his mother places her hand on his shoulder. "Why don't you see if Hannibal wants to come?"

Will nearly chokes, but manages to retain his composure and simply nod. He begins to pull his phone out of his pocket, but his father gives him a mock-serious look.

"Remember the rules? No devices at the table."

Will rolls his eyes a little, but shoves his phone back in his pocket. Snags another cinnamon roll.

When the breakfast dishes are cleared, Will retreats to his room. His heart gives a ticklish flutter as he stares at Hannibal's number. His thumb hovers over the call icon, then taps the message icon instead. Phone calls are awkward enough for him under the best circumstances. He doesn't trust himself to speak to the beautiful young man next door without stumbling over his words.

Hey Hannibal it's Will, he texts. Puts his phone down on the bed, his heart hammering, and gets up to change out of his pajamas. Just as he shrugs out of his tee shirt, his phone pings. He picks it up with trembling fingers.

Good morning, Will.

Will runs a hand through his hair. Considers how to answer; composes a dozen responses in his head, rejects them. He licks his lips. Decides to go with simple and direct. *We're going to the farmers market u want to come with?*

A few seconds later, *When will you be leaving for the market?*

Will thinks through his family's morning preparations. Showers, dressing, walking Winston. *Abt 1 hour.*

I would be glad to accompany you. Shall I meet you at your house?

Will flushes, his mouth quirking into a nervous half-smile. Even over text, Hannibal is unfailingly genteel. He sends back, *Great. Yes, you can come here*, instead of his usual, *Yeah*.

Then I will see you soon.

Will texts back, *OK*. Murmurs to himself, "See you soon."

The morning is already hot when Will gets Winston out for his walk; by the time he returns, he is dripping with sweat, and more than ready for his turn in the shower. Once he is clean and refreshed, he returns to his room to face, for perhaps the first time, the dilemma of what to wear. His small inventory of tee shirts, cargo shorts, sneakers, and sandals works fine for lazing about, or walking the dog, or for his days at the animal shelter. But having seen even a few pieces of Hannibal's wardrobe, he can't bear the thought of looking like a slob in front of him. He peers into his closet and sighs at his one pair of tan dress slacks, his one white button-down shirt, the brown dress shoes that seem clunky to him now. The brown blazer his parents have been meaning to replace since he's grown a bit more, but that they've thus far failed to convince Will to go shopping for.

He thinks of asking to borrow one of his father's nicer shirts, but dismisses the notion out of hand. Such a request will give rise to questions he can't answer. He snags a tee shirt and a pair of shorts from the closet, tells himself it will have to do.

Hannibal, of course, shows up at their doorstep in a light blue button-down and creamy-tan jacket, paired with slim-fitting coral shorts and supple leather boat shoes, carrying a wicker produce basket. Looking like he should be sailing in the Mediterranean, not traipsing around a farmer's market. But Will supposes this must be Hannibal's definition of casual.

"Hello, Will," Hannibal says with a sunny smile.

Will returns a lopsided grin. "Hey."

Will's family all show up at the door just then, bearing their canvas shopping sacks, eager to get moving. They pause to greet Hannibal warmly, then sweep him up in the happy maelstrom, all heading for the car. He joins them with ease, settling into their pace as though he is one of them, bundling into the back seat with Abby and Will.

"Everybody in?" Will's father calls from the driver's seat. Receiving answers in the affirmative, he puts the car in gear. "All right, we're off!"

"All right. I'm looking for eggs." Mr. Graham points to Mrs. Graham, "You wanted strawberries."

She nods. "And let's check for bread while we're here. That challah we got last time was just great."

"Strawberries and challah it is."

Abby reminds them, "And peach ice cream."

"And peach ice cream," Mrs. Graham agrees.

"We'll finish up with that," Mr. Graham says. Turns to Hannibal. "What's on your list for today?"

Hannibal pulls a neatly-folded slip of paper from the inner pocket of his jacket. "I would like to purchase a variety of herbs, and some seasonal fruits. Perhaps some flowers, if they are available. But I am mainly here to explore."

"This is a great place to explore," Will's mother says. "D'you prefer to fly solo, or do you want some company?"

"I would enjoy some company," Hannibal answers. He turns to Will. "Perhaps if Will doesn't mind?"

"Yeah," Will says, mesmerized by Hannibal's gaze. "Sure."

Mr. Graham checks his watch. "Okay. If we don't run into each other before then, let's meet at the back entrance at eleven. That'll give us all plenty of time to wander, and we can grab ice cream before they close." He sweeps an arm toward the front entrance of the large building that houses the indoor portion of the market. "Shall we?"

Will follows Hannibal from stall to stall, watching shyly as Hannibal takes in the offerings of the market with subtle delight. He examines bunches of herbs, turning them over in his hands. Takes a vendor up on the offer to pinch off and crush a leaf of basil, to experience its full aromatic glory. He consumes the leaf afterward, and chats about details of soil, and sun, and water, impressing the vendor with his sussing out of the plant's growing conditions. He tests a few more herbs, and ultimately purchases bunches of fresh basil, rosemary, oregano, and thyme.

They wander aimlessly, following the flow and bustle of the crowd, pausing now and then for Hannibal to admire or inspect various and sundry items. He lifts a jar of honey, basks in the amber light that filters through it, peers at the comb inside. Charms the beekeeper with his remarks on the sacred geometry of honeycombs. Purchases the jar and adds it to his basket. Returns the beekeeper's, "Namaste," as they part.

He passes by several vendors of fruits, glancing briefly at their offerings, before settling at a great mound of peaches. Hannibal picks up a peach with his delicate fingers, takes in the brilliant golden yellow and blush red of its lightly-fuzzed skin, gives it a gentle squeeze. Brings it closer to his face and inhales its scent. Nods to himself and places the fruit in his basket. Chooses five more with the same care. He pays for the fruit and heads for a stand with a variety of plums, moving with balletic grace through the crowd. Will lumbers after him, mumbling, "Scuse me, sorry," as he inevitably bumps against other shoppers.

When Will catches up, Hannibal smiles and hands him a red plum. "Do you know how to tell if a plum is ripe, Will?" he asks.

"Uh," Will says, "no, not really."

"Then I will show you," Hannibal offers. "First, you must feel it. Like this." He puts his hand over Will's, and a hot shiver runs up Will's body from his navel to his throat. Hannibal's fingertips guide Will's, pressing them lightly against the flesh of the fruit. "Feel how it's just a little soft? It yields to the touch slightly, but is firm beneath."

Will nods, unable to speak.

"That is one sign that we have chosen a good plum," Hannibal goes on, completely unfazed by the contact. "Now," he says, his eyes still on the fruit, "we take in the scent." He lifts Will's hand slowly, bringing the plum within a few inches of Will's nose, and leans in himself.

Blood rushes into Will's face. Hannibal is so close, he worries people might think they're kissing, right there in the middle of the market. A secret part of him screams, insanely, for him to close the gap between them, consequences be damned. Let the entire market watch.

Hannibal breathes in deeply, his eyes closed, then exhales. Opens his eyes and looks into Will's. "Do you smell that?" he asks. "Lightly sweet," he says, "but with a full-bodied roundness to it. Just like this plum, the scent is full of sun and summer." He takes his hand away from Will's and plucks the fruit from his palm. "That is another sign that we have

chosen a good plum. And just look at it.” He holds it up, turns it back and forth like a jeweler showing a diamond. “A very pretty blush, don’t you think?”

Will wipes absently at his fever-hot cheek. “Yeah,” he stammers. “It’s...that’s a good-looking plum.” He frowns inwardly. *Why say something so stupid?*

“I think we will take this one,” Hannibal declares. Then, “Will you help me choose some more?”

“Um, sure. Yeah.” Will turns to the task, grateful to have an excuse to tear his eyes away from Hannibal for a moment. He glances furtively around, but no one is watching them; no one seems to have seen the moment of strange intimacy that passed between them. Hannibal’s hand on his. His face so close. Will’s palms go damp, just thinking about it. He tries to concentrate on the fruit in front of him instead. He follows the steps Hannibal showed him, squeezing and scenting, and manages to find a couple of plums he thinks might pass muster. He turns to Hannibal. “Here,” he says, handing them over, “are these, um...what you’re looking for?”

Hannibal accepts them, turns them over in his hands, inhales their aroma, smiles at Will. “These are perfect, Will,” he answers. “Thank you.” He adds them to his basket and goes to the vendor to pay.

Will hears his little sister call his name from a few paces away and turns to find her leading her parents through the crowd. “Will,” she says again, “come on, we’re gonna get ice cream!”

Mrs. Graham gives her daughter’s shoulder an affectionate squeeze. “Let’s wait for Hannibal.”

Abby brightens when Hannibal appears next to Will. “Hannibal!” she chirps. “You wanna get ice cream with us?”

Hannibal smiles down at her. “I would love to.”

Mr. Graham puts his arm around his wife and takes his daughter’s hand. “Well, off we go, then.”

Abby and her father get their ice cream in cones; Will, Hannibal, and Mrs. Graham opt for paper bowls and plastic spoons. Mr. Graham insists on paying for Hannibal’s, and he graciously accepts. The picnic tables next to the market building are all taken, so they eat while they stroll back to the car.

“Did you get everything you were looking for?” Will’s father asks Hannibal.

Hannibal nods. “I’m very impressed with what I’ve found today. This has been a lovely trip; thank you for inviting me.”

“Sure thing,” Will’s father says. “Happy to do it.”

That night, Will dreams of blushing red plums, of biting into the yielding flesh of a ripe fruit. Of Hannibal leaning in and biting into the other side. He tastes the sweet, sun-golden juice

running down his throat, joins with Hannibal in consuming the fruit until there is nothing but a shining pit in his hand. Hannibal tosses the pit away and licks Will's fingers clean. Looks up, his eyes burning red as hot coals, and says, "They'll cast us out of Eden for this."

Will jerks awake, drenched, his cock oak-hard and aching. He finishes himself off and lies there, sticky with sweat and semen, waiting for the dream to fade.

Will looks up from the Sunday lunch dishes when the doorbell rings. He dries his hands hastily and heads for the entryway, only to have his mother materialize from around the corner, beating him to it.

Will's mother opens the door, and there on the porch is Hannibal, holding a rectangular dish covered with an airy linen towel.

"Mrs. Graham. Will," Hannibal greets them. "I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Not at all, Hannibal," Mrs. Graham beams. "Come in!"

"I'm afraid I cannot stay," Hannibal apologizes, "but I've brought something, a small token of my appreciation for allowing me to tag along on your outing yesterday." He hands over the dish, and Will watches as his mother lifts the towel.

In the dish are twelve dainty, cupcake-shaped pastries, little creations of puffed dough with paper-thin slices of peach and plum shaped into roses atop them, all lightly dusted with powdered sugar.

Will's mother gasps when she sees them. Looks from the pastries to Hannibal's face and back again. "Hannibal," she exclaims, "these are beautiful!"

Hannibal gives her a slight little bow and says, "Thank you, Mrs. Graham. I hope you enjoy them as much as I enjoyed spending time with your family."

"Well, we were glad to have you," Mrs. Graham says, "and thank you for these."

"Of course." Hannibal nods. "Until next time."

Mrs. Graham waves as Hannibal descends from the porch; he waves back and takes to the sidewalk, makes his way back to his aunt's house. Mrs. Graham shuts the door and turns to Will with a mischievous glint in her eye. "Let's try these before Dad and Abby get home."

Will follows her to the kitchen, where she places the dish on the counter and gets out two dessert plates. She uses a fork to gently lift two pastries from the dish and place them on the plates, then hands one to Will. He forgoes a fork, carefully picks up the delicate creation with his fingers and takes a bite.

The flavor that springs into his mouth is bright and tangy, buttery, warm, cheery. He and his mother both let out an emphatic, "Mmm," at the same time.

Mrs. Graham's expression is a mixture of disbelief and delight. "This is so good!" she says around a bite of pastry.

Will nods his agreement. Swallows. "Like sun and summer," he murmurs.

Mrs. Graham cocks her head. "What, sweetie?"

Will looks up. "Something Hannibal said yesterday. Plums smell like sun and summer. I guess they taste like it, too."

Mrs. Graham lays a hand on her chest. "That's so poetic."

"Yeah." Will takes another bite.

His mother looks to the front door. "And he's so...polite! And he can bake!" She shakes her head. "He is going to make some girl very happy one day." She takes another bite of her pastry. "Or some boy."

Will glances at her, but she's not looking at him, thank goodness.

A few days later, Will knocks on Hannibal's door. Waits patiently until he hears footsteps on the stairs, then in the entryway. Shifts his weight nervously from one foot to the other.

Hannibal opens the door, lighting up when he sees Will standing there, holding the dish and towel Hannibal brought over with the pastries. "Will! To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I, um," Will offers up the dish and towel, "I brought your stuff back."

Hannibal accepts them with graceful hands. "Thank you." He tilts his head to one side. "Would you like to come in?"

Will's heart thumps. "Sure."

Hannibal steps aside and lets Will in. "You may leave your shoes by the door," he says, gesturing to where his own polished brown loafers sit neatly.

"Right." Will slips out of his sneakers. Sets them next to Hannibal's shoes.

"Would you care for a beverage?" Hannibal offers.

"Yeah," Will says, "I'd love one."

Hannibal leads Will to the kitchen. Takes down two tall glasses from a cabinet. Opens the refrigerator and pulls out a bowl covered in plastic wrap, a fresh cucumber, and a bottle of club soda. The bowl is filled with colorful little balls that Will soon recognizes as pieces of melon—pale green honeydew, orange cantaloupe, and watermelon of a surprisingly deep red. Hannibal adds one ball of each melon to each of the glasses and turns to the cucumber. This he washes thoroughly, towels dry, and sets on a cutting board. He pulls a chef's knife from a

magnetic strip on the wall above the counter and uses it to cut thin slices from the center of the cucumber. He adds the slices to each glass, then wraps the remaining halves of the cucumber in plastic and returns them and the bowl of melon balls to the refrigerator. He looks up at Will. "Ice?" he asks.

"Oh, um, sure," Will answers.

Hannibal nods. Takes an ice tray from the freezer and adds a few cubes to each glass. Tops them off with club soda. Hands one to Will. Picks up his own and offers it forward for a toast.

Will touches his glass against Hannibal's and takes a sip. The flavor is subtle, but bursting with cool freshness. It amplifies the fizzing water's ability to quench Will's thirst, to drive away the sticky heat of the outdoors. He takes a deeper swallow. Tells Hannibal, "This is great."

Hannibal smiles over the rim of his glass. "It's even better with gin," he says.

Will starts. "How do you...? You drink?"

Hannibal shrugs. "The legal drinking age is much higher in America than in many places."

"Oh," Will says. "Right." He swirls the ice in his glass. Licks his lips. Gets down to the real reason he's ventured next door. "So...I'm taking Winston to the park later. D'you...do you want to come? With me?"

Hannibal brightens. "An excursion to the park sounds lovely. Perhaps I'll bring my supplies and make a few sketches while we're there."

Will raises a brow. "You draw?"

Hannibal inclines his head toward Will. "I do."

Will huffs out a little chuckle. "Is there anything you *can't* do?"

Hannibal takes another sip of his drink. "I have found many things that bring me enjoyment," he says. "That makes it much easier to devote the necessary time to building the skill."

Will nods down at his glass. "Yeah. I guess that makes sense."

"So," Hannibal returns to the original subject, "what time would you like to make our excursion?"

Will looks back up. "Oh, um, how about two?"

"Perfect."

Will parks the car, lets Winston out of the back seat, and attaches his leash. As Hannibal gets out, toting his stylish messenger bag, Will checks over his pockets. Keys, wallet, phone.

Treats for Winston. And the most important thing—a tennis ball. With his supplies verified, he shuts the car doors and locks up.

Will leads the trio through the park and down to a fenced-in field with a sign posted notifying guests that dogs can be let off the leash in the area, and a list of rules. There are a few patrons there, engaged in various forms of play with their pets. Winston perks up. Will scratches him behind his ear. “That’s right,” he says, “we’re gonna go play in a minute. We gotta get Hannibal set up first.”

Will looks up and finds Hannibal eyeing an empty park bench in a nicely shaded area nearby. “I think that will do,” Hannibal says, nodding toward the bench. He and Will amble over to it, and Hannibal takes a seat. Sets his bag down next to him and begins pulling out art supplies. Tan-toned paper, a flat board to lay it on. A canvas roll holding a selection of pencils and a carefully-capped utility knife. He selects a sheet of paper and a pencil.

“You sure you don’t mind me, y’know, leaving you here?” Will asks.

Hannibal smiles up at him. “I shall be perfectly content.”

“Okay,” Will says. “I’m just gonna,” he hooks a thumb over his shoulder at the field.

Hannibal nods. “Go have fun.”

With Hannibal ensconced on the bench, Will leads Winston toward the center of the field and lets him off the leash. Winston wags his tail and gives an excited little “woof,” clearly anticipating what comes next.

Will puts Winston through a few basic commands—*sit, stay, roll over, up, shake*—before pulling the tennis ball from his pocket. He holds the ball up for his dog to see. Winston bounds around him, eager to play, to chase, and Will can’t help but laugh. “You want it?” he encourages his dog. “You want the ball, boy?” Winston gives another “woof.” Will says, “Okay. Get ready…” Pulls his arm back. Throws the ball as far as he can, and watches with a goofy grin as his dog speeds off after it. Winston returns with the ball, and they have a quick game of “tug” before the dog relinquishes the ball and drops low, tail wagging furiously, waiting for the next throw. Will obliges.

Between throws, Will sneaks glances at Hannibal. Finds him sometimes engrossed in his sketching, and sometimes watching Winston’s antics with an amused look on his face. Once or twice he makes eye contact with Will, and smiles. Will waves, and Hannibal waves back, pencil in hand. Will is grateful the sun and exertion have already brought a ruddy flush to his face; otherwise he would fear Hannibal seeing him blush.

When Winston tuckers out, Will re-attaches his leash and returns to where Hannibal sits. “How’s the drawing coming?” he asks.

Hannibal looks up. Turns his board around to reveal his work. “See for yourself.”

On the tawny sheet is a beautiful rendition of Will and Winston—Will posed with his arm cocked back, preparing to throw the ball, and Winston mid-turn, ready to race after it. Each

stroke is lovingly rendered, each line confident and purposeful. Hannibal has caught their joy out of the air and sunlight and laid it on the page with his pencil.

Will stares at the drawing, mouth agape. “That’s...that’s incredible,” he says in a near-reverent tone.

Hannibal smiles up at him. “Thank you. Would you like it?”

Will’s eyes flit to Hannibal’s. “Seriously?”

Hannibal nods. Holds the drawing out to Will. “Yes.”

Will takes it gingerly, looks at it closer. Hannibal has used very little detail, capturing the essence of Will’s and Winston’s shapes in swaths of light and shadow, but it looks that much truer to the spirit of their play. “Incredible,” Will says again. He looks to Hannibal and asks, “Will you, y’know, hold onto it until we get back? I’m afraid I’ll mess it up.”

“Of course.” Hannibal accepts the drawing back from Will and stows it in the folio he’s brought. “You know,” he says, packing up his tools, “I have very much enjoyed drawing you today.” He locks eyes with Will. “You should sit for me sometime.”

“Sit...like, model?” Will asks, feeling breathless under Hannibal’s gaze.

“Precisely,” Hannibal says, keeping his eyes locked firmly on Will’s.

Will freezes in place, going hot all over, then cold. “You mean, like...naked?”

Hannibal gives him a sly smile. “That’s not necessary. Unless you would prefer it that way.”

Will’s mind goes unbidden to his dream of the plums. His mouth goes dry, but he manages to croak out, “No, I...no. That’s okay.”

Hannibal chuckles as he stands. “I’m teasing you, Will.”

“Oh,” Will says. A mild disappointment taints his sense of relief.

“Although,” Hannibal says, gathering up his things from the bench, “I should at the very least have you over soon. You and your family have been so welcoming to me. It’s time I repay you.”

Will slips Winston’s leash to his other hand. “You don’t have to...I mean, I would love to. If you want.”

Hannibal tucks his art supplies back into his bag. “We’ll make arrangements, then. But for now,” he bends and smiles at Winston, “we should get this fellow home, yes?”

Winston yawns. Will grins down at his dog. “Yeah, I guess he’s pretty much worn out. Winston, c’mon. Let’s get you some water so we can go.” He gives the leash a gentle shake, and Winston perks up. He takes his dog to a nearby water fountain, which has a special spigot and low bowl for pets. Winston drinks his fill and looks up expectantly. Will chuckles.

“Okay.” He reaches into a pocket and brings out a treat. Makes Winston go back through his commands before giving it over. Their ritual completed, he turns to Hannibal. “You ready?”

Hannibal nods, and follows Will and Winston back to the car.

A First

Chapter Summary

Will spends the afternoon with Hannibal. Things take a sexual turn.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains some elements of dubious consent.

Will picks up his buzzing phone, nearly drops it when he sees Hannibal's name on the screen. He swipes to answer and says, in a lightly quavering voice, "Hello?"

"Hello, Will. How are you?"

Will sits up on his bed, runs a hand through his unruly curls. "Good. You?"

"I am well, thank you. Is this a good time?"

"Yeah. Yeah, what's up?"

He can practically hear Hannibal's easy smile. "I was wondering if you would care to spend the afternoon with me."

Will's breath catches. Part of him wants to scream out, *Yes! A thousand times, yes!* Part of him wants to hide away, avoid any chance to stumble, to fumble, to disappoint. He licks his lips. Answers, "Sure."

"Excellent. When would you like to come over?"

Will checks the time. Measures out the hours he'll have before his parents leave work, pick up Abby from camp, and head home. "Fifteen minutes? Is that too soon?"

"Not at all. That's perfect."

Will nods out of habit. "Cool. I uh," he looks around his room. "I could bring over my Xbox or something. Unless you've got one."

"No, please do. I look forward to it. See you shortly."

Will's heart gives a little leap. "Yeah. Okay. See you soon."

Will loads up one of his favorite games, a shooter that he sometimes plays with a team online, but mostly plays in single-player mode. Hannibal is surprisingly good at the game, for a beginner, racking up kills with little help and only rarely making mistakes. But when Will asks if he wants to play yet another round, he shakes his head.

“I’m afraid I find this a bit pedestrian,” he admits.

“Oh, uh...okay,” Will says, apologetic. “I have other games, or...”

Hannibal turns to Will, fixing him with an intense, searching gaze. “We should do something else.”

“Like what?” Will asks, heart pounding.

“What do you want to do, Will?” A sudden sharpness in those dark eyes, like the teeth of a tiger.

Will pauses, heart hammering. Licks his lips. Settles for safety. “I dunno.”

Hannibal’s eyes bore into him. “I think you do know. And I think I know.”

Will pulls away a little. “If you think you know so much, what do you think...” he trips on his own words. Tries again. “What do you think I want to do?”

Hannibal gives a little half-smile, as if to say, *I thought you’d never ask*. “I think you want to kiss me, Will. And more than that.”

Will blanches, caught off-guard. Hannibal has seen right through him. He feels completely naked. More than naked—flayed. “Wh...what?” he stammers. “I don’t...”

And then Hannibal’s mouth is on his. Soft and warm, and tasting of a complex sweetness that reminds Will of the drinks of red wine he sometimes sneaks from his mother’s bottles. But this is far finer. And far more intoxicating.

Will jerks back. “What the hell, man?” he snaps, back to pretending. But his erection signals the truth.

Thankfully, Hannibal’s eyes never dart downward. But he knows. Somehow, he knows. “Will,” he says, patient, “you know exactly what the hell. Come here,” he commands.

Will cannot help but obey. He leans forward, but closes his eyes. He feels the warm tickle of Hannibal’s breath on his cheek. Feels Hannibal’s lips brush the corner of his mouth. Feels the deep, wanting ache in his groin. Feels another warm exhalation at his ear.

“This is what you want,” Hannibal states. He kisses Will’s earlobe so gently, so very gently.

Will sucks in a breath. “This is what I want,” he agrees.

Hannibal's kiss lingers. His lips quest further, sucking and playing. His tongue darts out and strokes the space behind Will's ear. Will moans, much to his own surprise. He is on fire with the urge to touch himself, but he does not dare move until Hannibal tells him to.

Hannibal's tongue continues to tease and taunt, flicking and darting in a way that makes Will quiver. But then Hannibal's hand caresses Will's groin.

"Wait." Will's hand closes over Hannibal's wrist. "I'm not, um," he stammers, "I'm not, y'know...gay."

Hannibal sits back. Shrugs. "Neither am I."

Will stares. "So why are you doing this?"

Hannibal's dark eyes remain steady. "Because I want to," he says simply. "Don't you?"

Will's heart hammers, sending the pulse in his throat jumping. "Uh...I mean..." He can't answer. He shifts the subject instead. "You...have you done this before?"

"Many times," Hannibal says.

Will's brows come together. "But you said you're not gay."

"Will," Hannibal says, patient, "you don't have to be gay to get off with another man. To have sex with one, even. Being attracted to another man does not make you gay."

"So what does it make me?" He flinches, corrects himself, "You, I mean. You. One. What does it make a guy if he, y'know...fucks another guy?"

Hannibal shrugs again. "It could make him many things; it could mean many things." Before Will can interject again, he goes on, "I used to attend a boys' boarding school. This sort of thing went on quite a lot. And I participated when I wanted to. Certainly, some of the boys who participated were interested only in other boys. But not all of us were."

"Then why do it?" Will asks.

"Why do it with a woman?" Hannibal counters. "For love, for companionship, for the fun of it." He looks up at Will. "For some, it was a simple need for human touch. For comfort." He leans back, lounging. "It wasn't all sex," he explains. "Sometimes there were great piles of boys simply holding one another." His mouth pulls into a wicked grin that shows off his very sharp canines, "And sometimes there were great piles of boys doing far more."

Will blushes, but he cannot look away. Hannibal's eyes have him pinned in place. "But," he says, still unable to comprehend. He blinks, finally tears himself away from Hannibal's gaze. "What about now? Isn't this a little...?"

Hannibal tilts his head back. Sandy hair falls away from his face. "You're getting hung up on labels," he says. "Why not just let it be what it is?"

Will hesitates. Licks his lips. "And..so...what is it?"

Hannibal takes a breath, in through his nose and then slowly out. “You,” he answers simply. “Me.”

Will shakes his head. “That’s it? Just...us?”

Hannibal leans forward, offers his graceful hand to Will. “Just us.” His hand stays steady, even as Will lets it remain, raised and empty. “Are you attracted to me, Will?” he asks.

Will opens his mouth, but nothing comes out except a breathy squeaking sound.

Hannibal’s posture does not soften, but his tone does. “I’m attracted to you, Will. I find you very attractive.” His eyes rove down to his still-outstretched hand, then up to Will’s face. “Are you attracted to me?” he asks again.

Will breathes. Waits. Whispers, “Yes.”

Hannibal ducks his head, so his gaze can make contact with Will’s downturned eyes. “So,” he says. “Would you like to get off with me?”

Will lets out a shuddering breath. He cannot manage another yes, cannot be so frighteningly honest again, so soon. He cannot bring himself to say anything. Hannibal waits patiently. Will’s breathing becomes tight.

Will’s hand trembles as it reaches out and grasps Hannibal’s.

Hannibal smiles.

“What do I...?” Will asks.

Hannibal keeps hold of Will’s hand, gives it a squeeze. “Just sit there,” he instructs. “Close your eyes if you like.”

Will squeezes his eyes shut, grips Hannibal’s hand, waits. Hannibal’s free hand snakes up his thigh, grazes his erection, reaches for the front of his jeans. Will’s heart pounds in his chest, driving his breath faster. Hannibal undoes Will’s jeans, holds the waistband with his hand and draws the zipper down with his teeth. Will’s head drops back as he moans again. His brows draw together as Hannibal’s hand dips into his shorts and strokes all down the length of his erection. He bites down on another moan.

“Do you like this?” Hannibal asks.

Will nods, the frantic motion bouncing his curls against his shoulders.

“Tell me you like it,” Hannibal says.

“I...I like it,” Will pants.

Hannibal’s free hand continues to stroke Will’s erection, slowly teasing it up and out of his shorts. “Would you like me to do something more?”

“I...yes. Yes.”

“What would you like me to do?”

Will’s eyes snap open, and he looks down at Hannibal. “Anything. Anything, please!”

Hannibal’s dark eyes glitter as he gives a wicked smile. “Would you like me to suck your cock?” he asks.

Will nods again.

“Ask me,” Hannibal commands.

“Please,” Will moans. “Please suck my cock.”

Hannibal nods, dips his head down. Presses his lips to the tip of Will’s cock, almost like a kiss, then slowly, slowly, sucks the head into his mouth.

Will makes a high-pitched little noise, trembles with the effort of holding himself back. The warm wetness of Hannibal’s mouth, the velvet of his tongue swirling against the head of his cock, is almost too much. Hannibal begins to work the shaft, pulling Will deeper into his mouth, rubbing his tongue up and down the length of his erection, gulping him down until his lips reach the very base of Will’s cock. Will sinks back, propping himself on his elbows, his breath heaving deep in his belly.

Hannibal’s head begins to bob up and down. Will cries out. His hand spasms in Hannibal’s grip. Hannibal shifts his hand, laces his fingers together with Will’s. Will hangs on, his other hand tangling in the bedclothes. His hips begin to buck, pushing his cock deeper into Hannibal’s mouth. Hannibal’s free hand slides around to cup Will’s ass, encouraging his thrusts.

Will’s heaving breath turns into helpless moaning. He loses himself in the waves of pleasure rolling over his body, in the deep, aching pulse in his cock. He loses all sense of time; it seems a second, and an eternity, when the pulse reaches a fever pitch, and he finally lets go, back arching, muscles straining as he comes into Hannibal’s mouth.

Hannibal swallows, runs his tongue around the head of Will’s cock one more time, and then lets Will slip from his mouth. Their hands finally part.

Will sinks onto the bed with a long, satisfied groan. He drowns for a few moments, warm and content. Then he feels the mattress dip, first on one side of his body and then on the other. He opens his eyes to find Hannibal straddling him. Will’s heart gives a sudden thump, and he scrambles to sit up. Hannibal grins and places a hand against Will’s chest.

“Wha...what are you...?” Will fumbles.

“Your turn,” Hannibal answers.

“Uh,” Will says.

Hannibal rubs Will's chest. "Don't worry," he murmurs, "you'll be good at this."

Will flushes, panicked. "I don't...I've never..."

"Relax," Hannibal soothes, unbuttoning his trousers.

Will takes a deep breath. Lets it out. His stomach shivers. "What do I do?" he asks, timid.

Hannibal takes Will's hand again, guides it forward. Will's heart pounds as he explores the firm bulge of Hannibal's groin. Hannibal sighs, smiling. "That's very good, Will," he says. "I like that."

Will slips his trembling hand into Hannibal's trousers, paws at the fine fabric he finds inside. Hannibal reaches in and tugs down his shorts, lets himself spring into Will's hand.

Will jumps a little. Flushes red. Looks down at Hannibal's cock, then up at his face. He begins to stroke Hannibal's cock almost experimentally. Hannibal's eyelids flutter, and he turns his face up to the ceiling as though basking in a shaft of sunlight. Will's slow, steady motion becomes a little firmer, more confident.

"Good," Hannibal confirms. "Keep going."

Will begins to harden again. He keeps up his pace, watches a warm flush begin to creep up Hannibal's neck and into his cheeks. Hannibal's cock pulses in his hand, seeming to grow harder with every stroke. Will's cock responds in kind.

Hannibal shivers. "Now," he says, "open your mouth."

Will parts his lips. Drops his jaw. Closes his eyes.

Hannibal scoots forward. Gently pulls Will's hand away from his cock. Slips into Will's mouth.

Will holds painfully still as Hannibal's cock slides across his tongue. He breathes hard through his nose.

"Relax," Hannibal says again. "I'm not going down your throat."

Will relaxes his jaw muscles, lets his tongue go soft. He flicks his eyes up at Hannibal, questioning, finds himself trapped by Hannibal's keen gaze. The ghost of a whimper escapes from him.

Hannibal reaches down and cups Will's cheek. Strokes it with his thumb. "Let's begin," he says.

Will swallows around Hannibal's cock. Moves his tongue just a little, trying out a few strokes against the underside of the shaft.

"Yes," Hannibal encourages. "Yes, Will. Good."

Will laps at Hannibal's cock more eagerly, feels himself rising.

"Good," Hannibal says again.

Will begins to bob his head, taking it slow at first. He hears Hannibal's breath begin to come in sharp little pants, and bobs faster, matching the rhythm of Hannibal's breathing.

"Mmm," Hannibal thrums. Reaches down. Runs his fingers through Will's curls. Lets his hand linger on the back of Will's head.

Will pauses.

"Don't stop," Hannibal whispers. "You're doing magnificently, Will."

Will sucks hard on Hannibal's cock, drawing a gasp and then a fluttering exhalation from him. Will begins moving his head again, and Hannibal nods his approval.

"Keep going," Hannibal urges. "Keep going, Will."

Will redoubles his efforts, sucking as he bobs his head, moaning against Hannibal's cock. He gropes his way around Hannibal's leg and grips his own cock, begins pumping away.

Hannibal leans forward, bracing his palms flat on the wall. "Yes," he hisses. "Like that."

Sweat begins to trickle down Will's face. He breathes like a bellows, nostrils flaring as he works Hannibal's cock and his own.

Hannibal gasps again. Shivers. "Will," he moans, "oh, yes, Will, yes."

Will's belly clenches tight with the effort of holding his orgasm back, but then Hannibal's back arches, and Will's mouth fills with tingling, salty liquid warmth, and he lets go. His cum splatters up the back of Hannibal's shirt.

Hannibal sags, the motion pulling his cock from Will's mouth.

Will lies there for a moment, mouth full of cum, eyes darting up to Hannibal's face.

Hannibal rolls off of Will and onto the bed. "You don't have to swallow," he says. "I won't be offended."

Will fights the hitching in his throat, closes his eyes, and swallows. The warmth dances down into his belly and settles there briefly before fading away. He turns his head to find Hannibal propped up on his elbows, gazing serenely back.

"That was wonderful, Will," Hannibal says. "Did you enjoy it?"

Will nods, his breath still coming too fast to speak.

Hannibal sits up and begins to unbutton his shirt.

"Oh shit," Will pants, "your shirt."

Hannibal chuckles. “It will wash out. Don’t worry.” He cocks his head. “Would you like to take a shower?”

“Uh,” Will says, “I...I think I’ll just wash up in the sink.”

Hannibal reaches beneath the bed and pulls out a package of moist wipes. “Here,” he offers them to Will. “If you’d like to attend to yourself a little bit beforehand.”

Will sits up. “Attend to myself?”

Hannibal stands. Stretches. Slips out of his trousers and shorts. Says matter-of-factly, “Your cock is covered in cum. You don’t want to smear that all over the inside of your pants and then walk down the hall to wash.”

“Oh. Um.” Will picks up the package and takes a few wipes. Mops at his crotch, then his mouth and hands.

Hannibal slips out of his shirt and plucks a wipe from the package. He rubs at the splotches on his shirt, ridding it of the worst of the mess. Plucks another wipe and dabs at the corners of his mouth, as though he has just finished an exquisite meal. Runs the wipe gracefully over his groin. Glides to the wastebasket and drops the wipes in, then to the door.

“Are...aren’t you going to put some clothes on?” Will asks.

Hannibal looks over his shoulder. “Why? There’s no one here but us.”

“Right,” Will mumbles. “But still, what if—”

“You worry too much, Will,” Hannibal says, slipping out the door, headed for the shower.

Dinner Party

Chapter Summary

Will struggles with his feelings. Dinner (and more) with Hannibal resolves some of his confusion.

Is everything all right?

The text makes Will wonder. Makes him question himself. Is everything all right, after what happened?

Has he lost his virginity? Does it count?

He flushes hot at the memory, begins to harden and then deflates, feeling embarrassed without understanding why.

He takes a tepid shower. Not quite cold, but close.

It's only been a day since he and Hannibal sucked each other off. Part of him is terrified someone will find out; part of him wants to shout it from the rooftops. If his parents knew...he banishes the thought from his mind, concentrates on getting dressed, focuses on each action and minute detail. The physical feeling of fabric against his skin. The color of each piece of clothing. The scent of clean laundry and the lingering smell of body wash. But then the thought intrudes—what would it be like to have Hannibal come up to him now, press his nose to the hollow of his neck, smell his freshly-showered skin? He shivers.

Will scoops up his phone from the bed, pockets it along with wallet and keys, and heads out.

At the animal shelter, he goes through the motions, completing each task on autopilot. His mind wanders back to Hannibal over and over again. He keeps his phone in his pocket. Feels it like a lead weight, insistent. But it doesn't chime a text alert all morning. His hand strays to his pocket repeatedly, and a heavy sense of disappointment washes over him every time he finds his phone still and quiet.

“You okay?”

The question snaps Will out of the fog of his thoughts and feelings. “What?”

Mrs. Trask, the volunteer coordinator who supervises his shifts. She gives him a motherly smile. “You seem like you're a million miles away today. You okay?”

“Oh.” Will stops sweeping. “Yeah, I just...gotta start thinking about college applications,” he lies. “It's a lot of pressure.”

Mrs. Trask nods. “I know what you mean. My daughter’s going through the same thing. It’s a shame all they put on you. Such a young age to be deciding so much.”

Will manages a lopsided smile. “Yeah. Whole future, you’ve gotta lock it down and make a choice about what you’re gonna do for the rest of your life.”

She chuckles. “Well, most people change careers a few times during their lifetime. I mean, look at me—I used to be a bank teller.” Her eyes twinkle. “But here I am now, doing something I truly love.”

“That’s really good,” Will says, his mind already starting to drift again.

Mrs. Trask gives his shoulder an affectionate pat. “You’ll find something you love,” she assures him. “And you’re smart. You’ll be successful at whatever you decide to do.”

“Yeah,” Will answers. Focuses back on her long enough to give a sincere, “Thanks, Mrs. Trask.”

She rolls her eyes. “How many times do I have to tell you,” another smile, “call me Ellen.”

“Thanks, Ellen,” Will says.

“That’s better.” She looks around Will to the section of floor he’s finished sweeping. “Looks like you’re almost done.”

Will checks his watch. “Right. I’ll finish this up and then I’ve gotta get going.”

Mrs. Trask nods. Turns to go back to her own tasks. “Sure thing. And Will? Don’t worry yourself too much.”

Will returns her nod. “Okay. Thanks again.”

Left alone, his thoughts return to Hannibal. As if on cue, his phone pings. He scrambles to retrieve it from his pocket.

I understand if you need some space. Take all the time you need. I will be here when you are ready.

Will’s heart does a complex tumble, tripping over a mix of emotions. I will be here when you are ready. An assurance, or a command? He shakes his head. Returns his phone to his pocket. Resumes sweeping.

Will lies on his bed, toying with his phone. His chest feels constricted. He slows his breathing, trying to calm his racing pulse. He opens his texting app. Closes it. Opens it again. Takes a long, deep breath and lets it out.

Hey.

A few seconds tick by. *Hello, Will.*

Will bites his lip. *Sorry it took so long to get back to you.*

There is no need to apologize. I understand. This must have been a lot to process.

Will begins a response. Deletes it. Goes with a simple, *Yeah.*

Are you all right?

He considers. Reels back over all the heavy thinking he's done over the past three days. Picks apart some more of the tangle of emotions that has trapped him for what feels like an eternity. *I think so.*

A pause. *Would you like to talk in person?*

Will's heart leaps up to choke him. He wipes his suddenly damp hands on his shirt. Picks up his phone again. *Yeah.*

May I request the pleasure of your company for dinner?

Will swallows, taken by surprise. So formal. So elegant. How can he resist such an invitation? He starts to type out, *Yeah*, out of habit. Thinks better of it. Replaces it with, *Yes*. Considers. Adds, *I'd be delighted.*

Splendid. Are you available at 7:00 tonight?

Let me check. It should be fine.

Do let me know. I look forward to hosting you, whenever it is convenient.

Will do. Thank you.

My pleasure.

Will immediately texts his mother, *Hannibal invited me over for dinner tonight. OK if I go?* Waits tensely for the reply.

Sure :) Enjoy!

Will breathes his relief. Sends back to Hannibal, *We're on.*

Most excellent. See you at 7:00.

See you then.

Will feels a giddy smile creep across his face.

Hannibal answers the door in his apron. A heavenly aroma wafts out around him as he beams at Will.

“Hi,” Will says, trying not to blush under the power of Hannibal’s smile.

“Good evening, Will. Do come in.”

Will steps across the threshold, removes his shoes. Remarks, “Something smells good.” Kicks himself for saying something so inane.

Hannibal doesn’t seem to mind, ushering Will into the dining room with a little bow. “Mixed mushroom ravioli in a white wine and cream sauce. Preceded by a simple salad with a lemon vinaigrette.”

Will marvels at the table, decorated with a linen runner and a gorgeous arrangement of greenery and fresh flowers at the center, and with a formal place setting at each end. He swallows drily at the thought of his clumsy fingers handling the delicate-looking flatware, the fine china, the crystal water glass. “Is this...is all this...?” He has trouble finishing the thought.

“I’ve been given special permission to bring out the china,” Hannibal says with what appears to be a subtle blush. “Please, won’t you sit?”

Will does as he is bidden, perching nervously on his chair.

Hannibal chuckles, not unkindly, and urges, “Relax.” He retrieves a carafe of chilled water from a serving tray on the bar and fills both water glasses, then disappears into the kitchen. He returns sans apron, bearing a serving bowl of salad and a tiny pitcher of dressing. He takes up the tongs and places a neat pile of mixed greens and fresh vegetables on Will’s salad plate, then fills his own. He lets Will pour his own dressing, then takes his turn. With the salad served, he takes his own seat opposite Will.

Hannibal picks up his salad fork and smiles. “Buon appetito,” he says, and spears the first bite.

Will takes up his own salad fork gently and maneuvers a small bite of salad into his mouth. The vinaigrette sings on his tongue, a bright complement to the crisp flavors of the salad. “Mm,” he exclaims. “This is great. Really delicious.”

Hannibal smiles across the table. “Thank you.”

Will follows Hannibal’s controlled eating pace, resisting the urge to plow through the salad, to get as much of that flavor into his mouth as he can. A mild sense of accomplishment sweeps through him at the thought that he has managed, in however small a way, to appear somewhat refined.

Hannibal dabs at his mouth with a napkin and rises. Collects both salad plates and takes them into the kitchen. Returns with a serving dish that suffuses the air of the dining room with the

delightful, delicious scent that greeted Will at the door. Spoons pasta onto Will's dinner plate and drizzles it with sauce. He serves himself and takes his seat again.

Will follows Hannibal's lead, cuts into a raviolo and lifts a piece to his mouth. The symphony of flavor that fills his mouth makes his eyes close and his breath come out in a groan of pleasure. The slight crystalline ting of salt just precedes the warm, earthy, basso notes of the mushrooms; the lilting soprano zing of wine lifts the smooth tenor richness of the cream. It all melds together in a harmony that nearly renders Will speechless. He chews slowly, savoring every note. Once he has swallowed that first bite, his eyes drift open, and he finds Hannibal watching him with clear satisfaction. "This is amazing," Will says. "Where did you get this?"

Hannibal takes a small sip from his water glass. "I made it."

Will looks down at his plate again, dumbfounded. Each raviolo seems so perfect. The Grahams have made pasta before, and it has never turned out anything like this. The pasta is delicate, nearly translucent, stuffed with just the right amount of filling, neither over-plump nor too flat. Each edge perfectly crimped. Each piece a consistent size and shape. He can hardly believe this beautiful creation was made by human hands.

But this is Hannibal. Elegant, graceful, masterful Hannibal. So full of talents.

Will's eyes flit up to Hannibal, then back to his plate. "It's amazing," he repeats.

Hannibal grins his pleasure. "I'm so glad you like it, Will."

"I love it," Will declares, taking another bite.

Even chewing slowly, Will makes short work of the entree. He accepts a second helping and enjoys it as thoroughly as the first. When he has finished, Hannibal again clears the plates, and brings the dessert: quenelles of lime sorbet atop a fan of crisp, whisper-thin vanilla cookies. The sorbet is refreshing and tart, a delightful palate-cleanser; the cookies are airy and sweet.

"Coffee?" Hannibal offers when the dessert plates are cleared.

Will shakes his head. "I'd better not. I'll be up all night."

Hannibal gives a delicate nod. "Then I suppose we had better talk."

Will's heart stutters. In the pleasure of the meal, he had forgotten his original reason for coming there. He licks his lips. "Right."

Hannibal rises. "Let's move into the living room. It will be more comfortable there."

Hannibal takes a seat in an armchair. Gestures for Will to take the couch opposite. Will obeys, lowering himself to the plush cushions.

“So,” Hannibal says. Lets the moment hang.

Will rubs the back of his neck. “Um. I guess...” he begins. Looks up at Hannibal. “I guess we should talk about what happened. The other day.”

“And what is it that happened, Will?”

Will cocks his head. Narrows his eyes slightly. Is Hannibal fucking with him?

Hannibal steeple his fingers. “I need you to say what it was,” he explains. “Give it a name.”

“I...” Will stammers. “I don’t know what to...I mean...it wasn’t exactly sex.”

“Because there was no penetration?”

Will blushes. Looks down at his hands. “I mean, yeah. I guess so.”

“So what would you like to call it?” So calm. So casual. As if they are discussing the weather, and not something of such significance.

“I don’t know,” Will says, a hint of sharpness creeping into his voice. “I don’t...” he shakes his head. “I can’t sit here and play head games. I feel like...” he sighs, leans back against the couch cushions. “I feel like my head’s been messed with enough.”

Hannibal’s face does not betray any hint of emotion. “Do you feel like I’ve messed with your head, Will?”

Will backtracks. “Not you. Not exactly. Just...the whole thing is really confusing, I guess.”

Hannibal tilts his head slightly. “Are you questioning your sexual orientation?”

Will stiffens, sits up a little straighter. “I mean, I still like girls.” Rolls his eyes inwardly. *Way to go. Not defensive at all.*

Hannibal simply nods. “But you also like what we did together. You like not-exactly-sex, with me.”

Will laces and unlaces his fingers. Shrugs. “I guess so, yeah.”

Hannibal leans forward. Rests his elbows on his knees, clasps his hands together. “Will,” he says, “you speak about this like you’re uncertain. I don’t think you are.”

Will avoids Hannibal’s gaze. “Well...what if I did like it?”

“Then you could ask me to do it again.”

Will’s eyes dart up, look to see if Hannibal is sincere. Hannibal’s dark eyes bore into him, strip him bare. He nearly quivers, pierced there, pinned in place.

“And I would,” Hannibal says, “if you wanted to.” His gaze softens. “I enjoyed it a great deal, Will. And I think you did, too. Tell me, honestly, how you felt about it.”

Will takes a breath. Feels his heart crashing against his ribs. "I felt..." he casts about for the right words. Settles for simplicity. For honesty. Whispers, "I liked it." Feels his face grow hot.

"And how do you feel now?"

Will opens his mouth to answer, but finds that nothing will come out. He has wrestled with this exact question for days on end, and come to no real conclusion. And here, now, under Hannibal's keen gaze, he feels exposed. Raw. Anger begins to warm in his chest. He rubs a hand over his brow. "I don't know, okay?"

Hannibal sits up, his features clouded with concern. "Oh Will," he says, sounding almost sad, "don't tell me I've broken you."

"I'm not broken," Will snaps, "I'm just...confused."

A pause. "I'm sorry," Hannibal says quietly.

Will's anger dies, replaced by fear that he's hurt Hannibal's feelings. "I'm not...it's not your fault," he says.

Hannibal leans back in the chair. "It is, though. I knew what I was doing. You didn't. I'm afraid I took advantage."

Will shakes his head. "You didn't take advantage of me. I mean...I told you I wanted to."

"And did you want to?"

Will finds himself saying emphatically, "Yes."

Hannibal smiles, and a warmth suffuses Will's entire body. "And you enjoyed it?" Hannibal asks.

Will nods. "Yes."

"Would you like to do it again sometime?"

Will's mouth goes dry. He hesitates. Considers. Nods again.

Hannibal lays his hands in his lap, ducks his gaze away from Will's. "Will," he asks, "may I kiss you?"

"Uh." Will pauses, at a loss for words. Finally quavers out, "Sure."

Hannibal crosses the room slowly, as if approaching a frightened animal. Sits down on the couch next to Will. Reaches out a hand and rests the tips of his fingers on Will's jaw, turning his head gently. Leans forward and lays a butterfly-light kiss on Will's lips. Sighs. Flicks his eyes up to meet Will's. "Would you like to kiss me back, Will?"

In answer, Will leans in and presses his mouth to Hannibal's, feels a heat rise from his groin and fill his belly, his chest, his limbs, his face. Leans in deeper, places a hand on Hannibal's back, feels Hannibal's elegant fingers begin to tangle in his hair. The head of his cock rubs against the fabric of his underwear as he begins to harden.

Hannibal leans back, taking Will with him as he reclines on the couch. Lets Will lie on top of him. Flicks his tongue against Will's lips. Gives a little "Mm" of satisfaction as Will's lips part to let him in. Plays his tongue against Will's.

Will's hips begin to move, grinding against Hannibal's thigh. He breaks the kiss with a small, breathy moan, his brows drawing together as he closes his eyes and loses himself for a moment in pleasure.

Hannibal reaches around, grabs the waistband of Will's shorts. Pulls Will closer, pushes his thigh deeper into Will's groin. Draws a louder moan from Will. Takes a long breath deep into his chest. "Upstairs," he says.

Will nods, frantic with desire. Leaps up from the couch and heads for the stairs. Hannibal follows fast on his heels, practically races him to the second floor and down the hall to the bedroom. As soon as the door shuts behind them, Will begins to tear out of his clothes, shedding shirt and shorts and underwear within seconds and starting in on Hannibal's. Hannibal's body bangs against the door, and he lets out a sharp little sound that makes Will pause.

"Keep going," Hannibal breathes.

Will unzips Hannibal's trousers, yanks them down. Pulls his underwear down with the same savagery. Reaches up to tear at his shirt and finds that Hannibal is already half done unbuttoning it. He puts his hands on either side of Hannibal's face and pulls him into another kiss, forces his tongue into Hannibal's mouth, stops only when he hears the sound of Hannibal's shirt hitting the floor.

Hannibal steps out of his trousers, puts his hands on Will's shoulders, pushes him back toward the bed. Will stumbles across the room, flops onto the bed. Hannibal climbs on top of him, kisses him savagely, seizes Will's erect cock and begins to stroke it.

Will yelps at the sudden pleasure, writhes against the blankets. Flails out an arm and finds Hannibal's shoulder, grips it tightly.

Hannibal works Will's cock with one hand and his own with the other, pumping furiously and moaning low in his throat. Will breathes in heavy, sharp gasps, gulping air with desperate speed. Hannibal pants just as hard, his breath coming in ragged little growls. Will bucks under him, eyes squeezed shut, mouth fixed in a slack-jawed expression of total submission to the sensations bombarding his body. Hannibal groans at the beauty of it.

Will's gasping suddenly turns to moaning, his pitch rising as his cock surges in Hannibal's hand. The sound drives Hannibal wild; his own cock responds in kind, and soon they come in unison. Hot white rivulets splash onto Will's heaving belly, and Hannibal collapses onto the bed next to him, shuddering as aftershocks of pleasure rock his body.

Hannibal recovers more quickly than Will, and gets up to retrieve the wipes from under the bed. Cleans up fastidiously and lays the pack on the bed next to Will. Gathers up and begins to don his clothes.

Will reaches for the pack of wipes without opening his eyes, grabs a handful, and scrubs at his sticky skin. Sits up slowly, his body sluggish, then gets to his feet. Crosses the room. Takes Hannibal's face in his hands and gives him a lazy, languorous kiss. "That was—"

A click from downstairs cuts off his words: the sound of the front door being unlocked. Will and Hannibal both freeze. "Hannibal?" A light, musical voice. Hannibal's aunt. Will's eyes go wide, and he begins frantically grabbing up his clothes and pulling them back on.

"She wasn't supposed to be home for another hour, at least," Hannibal whispers. Turns his head, calls, "Upstairs. I'll be down in a minute." Rushes to do up the last few buttons of his shirt.

"Okay. Goodness, something smells delicious. Did you cook?"

Hannibal opens the bedroom door and proceeds out to the landing, gestures for Will to follow him. Will zips up his shorts and goes after Hannibal. "I did," Hannibal calls down. "There's some left, if you're hungry." He takes a breath, smooths his hair, and just like that, his composure has returned. He flows down the stairs, all grace and calm.

"Starving. The dinner meeting got canceled. The client's flight was held up, so she won't be arriving until almost midnight."

"That's unfortunate." Hannibal rounds the corner to the dining room with Will in tow.

"This was more of a hospitality meeting; the real work is tomorrow, so we haven't actually missed much. How was your dinner party?"

There, in the kitchen, an elegant, middle-aged Japanese woman in an impeccably-tailored skirt suit, pulling a plate from a cabinet. She turns with a smile, then says, "Oh. Hello," when she sees Will.

"Hi, Ms. Murasaki," Will says, lifting a hand in greeting.

Her eyes light up with recognition. "Will! From next door. How are you?"

"I'm fine, thanks," Will answers. Shifts his weight to his other foot.

Ms. Murasaki leans casually against the counter. "So you're Hannibal's 'special friend,' for whom we use the china."

Will blushes. Begins to stammer a reply.

"Yes," Hannibal answers, saving him from the embarrassment of tripping over his words. "We were just about to begin cleaning up. But we would be glad to keep you company while you dine."

She waves a hand. "Don't worry about that, I won't get in between you and your cleaning." She turns to the serving dishes and begins portioning salad and ravioli onto her plate. "Besides, I have to get some more work done tonight." Looks at Will over her shoulder, "So I'm afraid this must be adieu for the evening."

"Oh, um," Will says, "it was good seeing you."

The corners of her eyes crinkle when she smiles. "You as well. And thank you for keeping Hannibal company, I'm certain he appreciates it."

Hannibal nods. "A great deal."

"Well," Ms. Murasaki says, "I'll leave you two to it. Good night, Will."

"Good night," he responds as she glides from the room. Graceful as a dancer. Just like Hannibal.

Hannibal goes to the sink and begins running water for the dishes. When Will hangs back, he turns and looks over his shoulder.

Will wears a shy little smile. "'Special friend?'" he asks.

Hannibal nods. "For whom we use the china." He offers up a dish towel. "Will you dry?"

Will comes forward and accepts the towel. "Sure."

Hannibal seems to lose himself in the task of gently washing the delicate china; for Will it is not so easy. His mind whirls with doubt and insecurity, excitement and giddy hope. As they move on from the china and to the serving dishes, Will pauses. Takes a breath.

"Is this...was this a date?" he asks, feeling the blood drain from his face as he does so.

Hannibal regards him with reserved coolness. "Would you like it to be?"

Will deliberates within himself. Feels a pit open up in his stomach. Looks down at the dish in his hands. "I, um. I don't know if I'm ready for that."

Hannibal takes a moment before going back to washing up. "Then it wasn't," he says, seeming completely unbothered. "Simply dinner with a friend." No mention of what came after dinner.

Will feels as though a door has shut, and regrets his choice. They finish the dishes in silence. Will dries his hands. Gives the towel over to Hannibal. Says, "I should go."

Hannibal makes no move to stop him. "Then I'll bid you good evening. Let me walk you to the door." So formal. So distant.

Hannibal opens the door, and Will steps out onto the porch. "I guess...I'll see you, then," Will says. "And, um. Thanks so much. For dinner." He almost adds, *And everything else*. But Hannibal's expression is closed to him, a mystery.

“My pleasure.” No inflection. Then, as his guest turns to start down the steps, “And Will?”

Will stops mid-stride. Turns back.

“I enjoyed making you come.”

Will turns scarlet, looks around to see if anyone heard. The street is empty. He looks up at Hannibal, aghast, but Hannibal simply stands in the doorway, relaxed. Placid. Will can’t think of anything to say.

Hannibal finally gives a tiny smile. Just a faint lifting of the corners of his mouth. “Good night, Will.”

“Y-yeah. G’night.” Will rushes down the steps and back to his own door.

Call

Chapter Summary

Will calls Hannibal. Phone sex ensues.

Will's fingers tremble uncontrollably. He thinks he finally understands why people say, *I could use a drink*. Not that he has any real experience with drinking, but he understands the need for a chemical cushion, the desire for an aid to still the anxiety, to quiet the clamor of doubt. Liquid courage. He rubs his hands together, takes a deep breath. Picks up his phone again.

Hey.

He puts his phone down. Walks to the other side of his bedroom. Stares back at his phone. Paces back and forth. It seems an agonizing eternity before his phone pings. He picks it back up.

Hello, Will. How are you?

Will runs his hand through his hair. *Good.*

Glad to hear it. I was worried.

Will's face catches in an awkward expression, unsure whether to smile or frown. He texts back, *Worried?*

Yes. I thought I had frightened you away.

Will's face settles on a frown. Several days have gone by without any communication; no wonder Hannibal has worried. *No*. He bites his lip. Considers how to proceed. *I just needed some time to think*. Adds, *Again*.

And what are you thinking?

Will balks. Breaks out in a sweat. Wonders how to answer. How to explain the storm of emotions and desires that has plagued him. He takes a deep breath. Decides to be brave. Taps "Call."

Two rings. Then, Hannibal's smooth, calm voice. "Hello, Will."

Will manages to keep the quaver out of his voice. "Hey, Hannibal."

"So, you decided to call?" A slight tinge of amusement.

Will shrugs. "Yeah. I thought...I thought it would be better. This way."

"And no concrete record of the conversation, for someone to find later."

"What? No, I mean...yeah, I guess that's true, but that's not why I called."

"Oh?"

Will licks his lips. "Yeah. I," he hesitates. "I just wanted to...to say it."

Hannibal waits.

Will heaves a sigh. "Like...you said I should say it, or name it, or whatever, and I couldn't. And I don't know if giving it a name, to what we did, I don't know if that's important. But I think maybe talking about it is. So...I wanted to, y'know...talk about it."

"I see." A pause. "Would you like to come over?"

"I think..." Will scuffs his foot against the carpet. "I think this is good. For now."

"Very well. How would you like to proceed?"

Will perches on the edge of his bed. "I guess just...we just, y'know...*talk*."

"I can do that with you, Will."

Hannibal's tone is gentle. Caring. Will relaxes a little, settles more comfortably on the bed. "So, um," he says, "I've never done anything like that."

"With another man?"

"With..." Will rubs his damp palm against his shorts, "with anybody."

"You've come to me a virgin." Surprise at the revelation.

"Yeah." Easier, now that it's out in the open.

"Will, this changes everything."

Will panics. "What? No it doesn't, I mean, it doesn't have to. I mean...what do you mean, changes everything?"

"Relax, Will," Hannibal soothes. "I simply mean that I have more of a responsibility to you, now."

Will's brow furrows as he frowns. "Responsibility?"

"Everything between us will be a series of firsts," Hannibal explains. "Like it or not, it will shape you. *I* will shape you. So I must be careful."

The corner of Will's mouth pulls back. "I'm not made of glass."

“No. You are flesh and blood. And more than that—mind, and soul, and secrets. You are human, and therefore a feeling creature.”

Will rolls his eyes. “I’m just saying, you don’t have to treat me like I’m breakable.”

Hannibal does not answer. Not right away. A handful of seconds ticks by in silence. Just as Will draws breath to ask if Hannibal is still there, Hannibal says gently, “I know you mean what you say, Will. But I also know that our encounters have left you feeling conflicted. They have caused you turmoil. That is not my intention, if we continue.”

“Hannibal, I just,” Will pauses. Slows down. Tries not to sound desperate. “I just needed to think. And I’ve done that now. And I…” he licks his lips, “I think I’m ready. For whatever this is.”

“And now you must name it,” Hannibal instructs. “What is this, Will?”

Will’s breath catches, snags on the knowledge that his answer could make or break the future. “It’s…” he looks around his room, listens carefully to the rest of the house, to the driveway and the street outside. No one home but him and Winston. No parental vehicles approaching. No one to hear him at all, except for the boy next door, at the other end of the call. “It’s sex,” Will declares. “It’s sex, and I want it. With you.”

“Then,” Hannibal says, in a throaty purr that makes Will’s head spin and his cock ache, “that is what you shall have.”

Will shivers. “When?”

Hannibal chuckles. “Now.”

Will’s brows shoot up. “Okay, um, I can be over in—”

“No. Not here.”

“But…” Will panics. “I can’t…we can’t do it over here, my parents—”

“Will.” Stern. Then, softer, “I want you to go and lock your bedroom door.”

Will frowns. “I…what?”

“Stay on the phone. And lock your door.”

Will gets up from the bed. Crosses the room. Locks his door. “Okay,” he says, “it’s locked.”

“Good. Now.” Again, that throaty purr, “Tell me what you’re wearing.”

Will looks down. “The, uh. The same thing I’m usually wearing, I guess. Tee shirt, shorts.”

“Take them off.”

Warmth begins to bloom just behind Will’s navel. “My clothes?”

“Yes. Take them off.”

“I’ll have to, um, put the phone down,” Will says, unbuttoning his shorts.

“That’s all right,” Hannibal tells him. “Pick it back up when you’re finished.”

“Okay.” Will sets his phone down on his desk. Unzips his shorts and lets them fall down around his ankles, steps out of them. Pulls his tee shirt over his head and shrugs out of it, drops it on top of his shorts. Hesitates. Tugs down his boxers and slips out of them as well. Picks his phone up. “Okay.”

“Are you naked, Will?”

Will blushes. “Yeah, I’m...I’m naked.”

“And how do you feel?”

“I feel, um...” Will looks down at his body, looks back up around the room. “I feel kind of...like I’m getting away with something.”

“Go on,” Hannibal invites.

Will runs a hand through his hair. “Like...I’ve been naked in my room before. A lot. But this is...different.”

“This is quite different. Let me show you how different. Go to the window.”

Will’s heart pounds away in his chest as he crosses the room. He hangs back from the window a little, even though the curtains are drawn.

“Will, I need you to look out the window.”

He twitches the curtain back just a fraction and peeks out. Across the span of lawns and driveways that separates the Graham house from the Murasaki house, across the narrow sea of humid air, he sees Hannibal’s bedroom window. Blinds drawn up, curtains thrown back. Hannibal, lying on the bed, stark naked. Will’s heart flops wildly. “Aren’t you afraid somebody will see you?” he stammers out, mouth agape.

Hannibal gets up, all calm, fluid grace, and lowers the blinds. “I’ve been seen by the only person that matters,” he says. “Now you know we are both getting away with something. Let’s get away with something more.”

Will licks his lips. “Something more?” he repeats.

“Go and lie on your bed,” Hannibal instructs.

Will does as bidden, stretching out on his back. “Okay. What do I do now?”

“I want you to remember what we’ve done together, Will. I want you to hold it in your mind. Everything from when I first kissed you to the last moment of your last orgasm with me.

Remember how it felt to be kissed. Remember how it felt to come in my hand.”

A warm flush blooms in Will’s face. Travels down his neck. Diffuses into his chest, his belly, his groin.

“Touch your face, Will. Stroke your cheek with the back of your fingers. Gently. And tell me what you feel.”

“It feels...” Will casts about for the right words. “My skin is warm. Hot. It’s kind of...tingly.”

“Trail your fingertips across your cheek, to your mouth. Graze them across your lips. Feel your breath on your fingers. Feel its warmth. Breathe slowly, deeply, as you touch. How does that feel?”

Will closes his eyes. Slows his breath. Teases his mouth. Draws his fingers away to say, “It tickles a little bit. But in a good way.”

“Do you feel anything else, anywhere in your body?”

Will concentrates. Expands his awareness. “I feel warm. All over,” he breathes. “I can feel my pulse...everywhere.”

“Hold onto that,” Hannibal says. “Now trail your fingers down your throat. Keep your touch light. Feel that warmth in your skin. Feel the pulse jumping in your throat. Feel it coming faster. Feel it begin to build your arousal. Are you feeling aroused, Will?”

Will’s fingertips linger at the hollow of his throat. His pulse does begin to come faster. “Yes,” he answers.

“Then bring your hand lower, to your chest. Let it hover just above your heart. Feel the heat radiate between them, between your hand and your heart. Feel the beating of your blood in your chest, in your fingertips. Feel it in your belly. In the flesh of your inner thighs. Feel the blood coursing through your body. Feel it coursing into your cock.”

Will jumps. His blood has indeed been coursing into his cock, bringing him half-hard already.

“Lay your hand on your stomach, just above your navel. Breathe into your belly. Take deep, warm breaths all the way down. Pull them in. Feel your breath beneath your hand. Now, begin to rub slow, small circles with your hand. Lightly. Caress your skin. Let the circles become larger, dip lower. Lower still.”

Will’s mouth drops open. His cock hardens in anticipation as his hand strays lower.

“What do you want, Will? What do you want to do?”

Will can’t keep his breath slow and deep any more. “I want to...to...” he lets slip a little moan. “I want to touch myself...”

“Not yet,” Hannibal says, his voice husky. “Not yet. Feel your desire building. Let it fill you. Let it lift you. Let it carry you.”

“Please,” Will whispers. His hand slips lower, fingers stretching, trembling, toward his aching cock.

“Reach down and brush your fingertips along your shaft.”

Will whimpers as his fingers make contact.

“Keep touching like that. Light fingers. Gentle strokes. Go on like that. Just like that, Will.”

Will listens to Hannibal’s breathing, suddenly audible. He begins to sweat.

“Wrap your fingers around your shaft, now, and stroke the head of your cock with your thumb.”

Will complies with a moan, his back arching.

“Mm,” Hannibal groans. “Yes, just like that, Will. Just like that. Keep going.” Breath coming faster. Harder. “Tell me what you want.”

“I want to jerk off so bad...”

“Slowly. Do it slowly. Long strokes, from deep at the base of your shaft, all the way to the head of your cock.”

Will gives a long moan at the first stroke. Grips tight and continues to pump with agonizing slowness.

“Yes,” Hannibal moans, and Will loses his control, begins stroking himself with furious abandon. “Yes.” Louder, this time.

Will’s legs writhe, tangling in the bedclothes as he builds toward climax. He and Hannibal trade moans back and forth, an erotic call-and-response that drives Will to a dizzied frenzy. Finally, a long moan boils out from deep in his belly, and cum spills down over his fingers.

In the afterglow, he hears Hannibal panting into the phone. Hears the panting gain speed and depth, reach a fever pitch, stutter out into a satisfied groan.

Will lies on the bed, just listening to Hannibal breathe. Feeling his own breathing return to normal. Feeling his pulse still thundering in his throat, his face, all the way to his fingers and toes. Feeling a lightness buoy his whole being.

“Will?” Soft. Languorous. “Are you still there?”

Will blinks lazily. “Yeah, I’m still here.”

“Good.” Hannibal gives a long sigh. “Was that good for you?”

Will sits up slowly. “Yeah. Yeah, it was really good.”

“I’m glad. It was good for me, too.”

“So...what do we do now?” Will asks.

“Now that we have gotten away with this,” Hannibal says, “we make arrangements to be alone together soon, and find out what else we can get away with.”

La Petite Mort

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gives Will a special experience. Will makes an important decision.

As soon as Hannibal's bedroom door shuts, Will launches himself at Hannibal, pressing him with kisses, pawing at his belt buckle. Hannibal puts his hands on Will's shoulders, gives them a light squeeze, then gently pushes Will back until the kiss is broken.

Will searches Hannibal's face. "Am I...did I do something wrong?" he asks.

Hannibal leans forward and plants a soft kiss on Will's mouth, then nuzzles his cheek. "Not wrong," he says, "just hasty."

Will frowns. "But I thought we were going to...y'know..."

Hannibal pulls back. Looks deep into Will's eyes. "Relax," he purrs. "We have all night."

Will reddens under the power of Hannibal's gaze. "Oh...okay."

Hannibal lays a warm hand on Will's cheek, strokes his thumb across the vivid pink there. "I like the way you blush, Will," he murmurs. "It's very pretty."

"Pretty?" Will squints. "Like a girl, pretty?"

Hannibal chuckles. "Like a Grecian youth, of ancient mythology. You would make a lovely Ganymede, Will. Stolen away by the gods for his beauty, to become the cup-bearer of Zeus. I'll draw you that way, sometime."

Will's mouth quirks into the beginning of a nervous smile. "Do you...do you want to do that now?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "Right now, I want to kiss you till you're rosy all over. Come," he says. Takes Will's hand. Leads him over to the bed. Draws him down to sit, wraps an arm around him, pulls him forward. Grazes Will's lips with his own.

Hannibal's breath flows warm across Will's mouth, sending a tingle from his scalp down the back of his neck, into his shoulders. He shivers. Hannibal's nose brushes against his, and then their lips meet, pliant and sweet. Will melts against Hannibal, reaches out and presses a hand to the small of Hannibal's back. Hannibal strokes his hand all down Will's spine, slips it up under Will's shirt. Will breaks the kiss, then goes in for another. Moves his mouth against Hannibal's, luxuriates in the feel of Hannibal's soft lips against his own. Hannibal leans sideways, pulls Will down to lie on the bed. His hand moves away from Will's back and

strays up to stroke Will's curls. Will follows suit, reaching up and running his fingers across Hannibal's hair.

Hannibal's smile brings their mouths apart for a moment. He runs his fingers through Will's hair, begins to massage his scalp a little.

"Mm," Will murmurs, "that feels good."

Hannibal kisses Will's cheek. "I'm glad you like it," he whispers. Presses his mouth to Will's again, more firmly this time.

Will cups Hannibal's cheek, then brings his hand to rest against the back of Hannibal's neck. Brings his body closer, until their chests touch. Feels the beat of Hannibal's heart quickening. His own heartbeat speeds in response. He trails his hand down Hannibal's neck, his shoulder, his arm. Brings it around to rest on Hannibal's taut stomach, rubs at his abs through his shirt.

Hannibal's mouth opens, lets out a soft, "Aah?"

Will's eyes flit up, find Hannibal's closed. "Do you like that?"

Hannibal swallows. "Very much, Will."

Will untucks Hannibal's shirt, slips his hand inside, runs it across Hannibal's belly.

Hannibal gasps. Shivers. Squirms closer to Will.

Will's body grows warm all over. He leans his head forward, lays fevered kisses on Hannibal's throat as he continues to caress Hannibal's stomach. Flicks his tongue out. Tastes salt on Hannibal's heated skin. His hand wanders lower. He begins to run his tongue up the side of Hannibal's neck, to his earlobe.

Hannibal sucks in a long, shuddering breath. "Will," he moans. "Oh, Will..."

Will laps at Hannibal's earlobe, pushes his hand lower, slips his fingers inside the waistband of Hannibal's trousers. Hannibal reaches down and unbuckles his belt with eager fingers. Will thrusts his hand down Hannibal's pants, finds him erect. Will's pulse thunders down to his groin, brings him up as well. He seizes Hannibal's cock, squeezes against its hardness. Hannibal's back arches, thrusting his hips forward, pumping his cock in Will's closed hand. Will tugs at Hannibal's trousers, trying to pull them down one-handed. Hannibal reaches to help, slips his trousers and underwear down over his hips, baring himself.

Will lightens his grip and begins to stroke Hannibal's cock, sucking his earlobe at the same time. Hannibal wraps his arms around Will, sinks his fingers into the flesh of Will's back, moans against his neck. Will's mouth drops open at the sound, the feel of Hannibal's warm breath on his skin. He strokes Hannibal's cock faster, reaches his free hand into his own shorts and begins to work his own erection.

Hannibal rolls over onto his back, pulling Will with him. He unbuttons Will's shorts, draws down the zipper, pulls them down. Tugs down Will's boxers. Helps Will slip out of both, then roughly tugs his shirt over his head, down his arms. Discards it on the bed. Kicks off his

own trousers and underwear, lets them fall to the floor. Unbuttons his shirt and throws it open.

Will bends and licks Hannibal's chest, right up the cleft between his pectoral muscles. Tastes his sweat. Finds his way back to Hannibal's mouth, eagerly accepts his hungry kisses. Hannibal nips at Will's lower lip, and Will presses his mouth to Hannibal's more firmly. Hannibal bucks his hips against Will's hand, growls low in his throat, bites harder at Will's lip. Will whimpers, leans into it. Hannibal lets go, brings his hand up, shoves two fingers into Will's mouth. Will sucks at his fingers, pumps his cock with desperate speed, works his own just as fiercely. Hannibal's head drops back as he writhes on the bed, moaning. The sound drives an ache deep in Will's balls, brings his cock rock-hard. He gasps for air, squeezes his eyes shut.

Hannibal flounders on the bed, groaning, "Come on me...come on me, Will. Come for me."

Will moans, long and high, and comes onto Hannibal's belly. Cum spurts from Hannibal's cock, mingles with Will's. Will opens his eyes slowly, holds his position for a moment, watches Hannibal's glistening chest rise and fall as he gulps air. Slips from the bed to the floor. Pulls out the pack of wipes, scrubs down his cock and his hands. Offers the pack to Hannibal. Hannibal reaches out with languorous hands and takes it, wipes the cum from his belly. Turns his face to Will.

"Come back," he says, patting the bed next to him.

Will obeys, climbing back into the bed. He spoons up against Hannibal's side, hooks his leg over Hannibal's, drapes an arm over his chest. Hannibal slips his arm beneath Will's neck, lays his hand on Will's shoulder. Strokes his skin, his touch tender. Turns his head and kisses Will's brow. Will closes his eyes. Settles in deeper. Lets himself drift off, feeling serene and satisfied.

Will wakes alone in the bed, awash in soft lamplight. He rubs at his eyes, looks around. Finds a robed Hannibal sitting in a chair across the room, facing him, a sketch pad in his lap, pencil in his hand.

"Lie back," Hannibal whispers with a little smile. "Just like you were."

Will eases back down to the mattress, lying on his side, arm extended toward where Hannibal had lain. "Like this?" he whispers back.

Hannibal nods.

Will lies still and quiet. Watches Hannibal draw. Hannibal's face is utterly calm, his expression relaxed. The corners of his mouth rise into a gentle smile every time his eyes flit up to refer back to Will's body. Will wonders whether Hannibal knows he's doing it, giving that hint of a smile. Finds himself smiling a little, too.

Hannibal tips his head to one side. “Will,” he says, his voice low, “close your eyes. Relax your face. You must look like you’re sleeping.”

“Sorry,” Will says, shutting his eyes. “Couldn’t help it.”

“It’s all right,” Hannibal murmurs. “Just hold still for a minute.”

Will begins to drowse, floating away on a sea of tranquility. The only sound in the room is the light scratch of Hannibal’s pencil on the paper. Will’s breathing grows slower.

“All right,” Hannibal says gently, “you may open your eyes, if you wish.”

Will’s eyes drift lazily open. He yawns. “I might fall back asleep for real.”

Hannibal chuckles. “If you do, I will kiss you awake again.”

Will’s heart thumps. “Then maybe I’d better fall asleep.”

Hannibal’s eyes meet Will’s. He smiles. Drops his gaze back to his sketch pad. “I will kiss you when I’m finished, anyway,” he says.

Will yawns again. “Promise?”

“I promise. And I’m nearly finished.”

Will gives a leisurely blink. “Do I make a lovely Ganymede?” he asks.

“I’ve decided to draw you as Endymion,” Hannibal answers, eyes still on his art. “Beloved of Selene, the moon. Cast into eternal sleep, that she might gaze upon the beauty of his slumber every night.”

Will smiles, his cheeks tingling. “You think I’m beautiful in my slumber?”

“I think you’re beautiful in every state,” Hannibal says matter-of-factly. Then, with a wicked grin, “Particularly in a state of undress.”

Will’s cheeks begin to burn. “I, uh...I feel the same way about you,” he admits.

Hannibal looks up from his sketch pad. “This is good,” he says. “It will make our time together extremely pleasant.” He returns to his work.

“I think our time together has already been extremely pleasant,” Will says, a languorous smile playing about his lips.

“Oh, Will,” Hannibal says, his eyes still on his sketch pad, “I have so much more to show you.”

Will licks his lips. “Like what?” he ventures.

Hannibal smiles. Raises his face to gaze across the room at Will. Says slowly, “There’s a French euphemism for orgasm, *la petite mort*. It means *the little death*.”

Will cocks his head, scrutinizes Hannibal's face, trying to see if he's teasing. "Death? An orgasm isn't anything like dying."

Hannibal arches one eyebrow. Sets his sketch pad aside. "Isn't it, though? Haven't you ever had that experience with a particularly strong orgasm—cresting the wave and falling into the chasm? Doesn't it feel a bit like death?"

Will looks away, suddenly bashful. "I don't know," he mumbles.

Hannibal leans forward in his chair. Peers at Will for a long minute. "You *don't* know," he confirms with a grin. "Oh Will," he says, gleeful, "this is something we have to fix."

Will's head snaps back in Hannibal's direction. "I don't...you mean *now*?"

Hannibal nods, his dark eyes twinkling. He rises from his chair. Crosses the room. Sits on the bed next to Will. "Is this something you would like, Will?" he asks.

Will props himself up on one elbow. Looks up at Hannibal. "I mean...it sounds great, but it sounds terrifying, too."

Hannibal lifts one shoulder slightly. "It can indeed be both. But if you would like to try," he reaches out and strokes Will's face, "I will try to keep it from being too terrifying. We can start slow."

Will nods. "Okay."

"Come and kiss me, Will," Hannibal says.

Will sits up. Leans in and plants a kiss on Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal wraps his arms around Will, draws him in closer. Gives Will soft, lingering kisses until the tension goes out of his body. Will brings his hands up, places them on Hannibal's chest. Hannibal strokes Will's back, his touch feather-light. Will shivers.

"Are you cold?" Hannibal asks, nuzzling at Will's nose.

"No, just...kind of ticklish."

Hannibal lays his warm palm against Will's back, brings more pressure to his touch. "Better?"

Will kisses Hannibal again. "Yeah. That feels good."

"And this?" Hannibal asks, sliding his hands down to cup Will's ass.

Will nods. "That's good, too."

Hannibal kisses Will's cheek. "Good." Finds Will's mouth again. Presses his lips to Will's. Slowly runs the tip of his tongue over Will's lower lip. Will opens his mouth, accepts Hannibal's tongue. Hannibal leans forward, gently pushing Will down onto his back, kissing him all the while. Will puts his hands on either side of Hannibal's face, holds him in place,

plays the tip of his tongue against Hannibal's as Hannibal slips out of his robe and lays it aside.

Hannibal withdraws his tongue from Will's mouth, lays kisses on his cheek, his jaw, his throat. Makes his way down Will's body, kissing his chest, his stomach, pausing to nibble and lick at his navel before moving lower. He kisses his way from the base of Will's erect cock to the head. Takes Will into his mouth.

Will sighs his pleasure as Hannibal laps and sucks at his cock, strokes his thighs. Then he hears a drawer glide open, hears the crinkling of what he somehow knows is a condom wrapper. He opens his eyes and looks down. Hannibal has not stopped sucking his cock, but his hands are busy now, unrolling a condom down over his extended index and middle finger, snapping open the cap of a bottle, pouring glistening lubricant all down the condom.

"Hannibal, what are you—" Will starts.

Hannibal brings his head up, lets Will's cock out of his mouth with an audible pop that makes Will shiver. "Relax," Hannibal says with a smile. "Lean back."

Will slides back a little and props himself on his elbows. Hannibal's hand comes to rest on his chest, and exerts gentle pressure. Will complies with the implicit command, falling back against the mattress again.

"Spread your legs wider," Hannibal instructs. "And pull your knees up a bit."

Will plants his heels on the edge of the bed frame. "What are you—" he tries again. But Hannibal sucks his cock into his mouth again, and Will's words turn into a hungry moan.

Will feels Hannibal's condom-wrapped fingers slip behind his balls and trail their way back to his ass. The feeling begins as a tickle, then morphs into something far more pleasant as Hannibal's fingers begin to explore. Will's lips part. He breathes in, filling his lungs, anticipating, hesitating.

Hannibal's head bobs up, his mouth lets go of Will's cock. "Relax," he says again. His fingers stroke at Will's hole.

Will lets his breath out in a low *whoosh*. Draws in another breath, deep into his belly. He gives a long, slow exhale that ends in a stuttering shudder of breath as Hannibal's fingers slip inside him.

Hannibal moves his fingers slowly, coaxing Will to open up for him. "That's it," he murmurs. "That's good, Will." Will makes timid little moans with every stroke, closing his eyes tight. Hannibal watches Will for a few moments. Smiles. Dips his head back down and takes Will's cock into his mouth again.

Will hisses in a breath in surprise, lets it out in a long, low, "Mmmm."

Hannibal bobs his head and moves his fingers in a steady rhythm, building Will up, listening intently as Will's mouth drops open and his moans become more forceful. When they reach a

crescendo, he gentles his motions, gradually slowing to almost nothing. “Don’t stop,” Will begs, and Hannibal begins the process of speeding up again. He quickens his pace until Will’s moans reach a fever pitch, then drives his fingers deep into Will, massages the gland inside him as he sucks on his cock as hard as he can.

Will’s cum rockets into Hannibal’s mouth with a force he’s never experienced alone. His breath locks tight in his chest while his pulse thunders hot in his throat, his face, his temples. A twinkling red mist suffuses his vision, then gives way to sparkling electric blue. His head spins, slides into a falling sensation. He finally remembers to breathe, and sucks in air, shuddering all over. He lies on the bed, unable to move, slowly coming back to himself.

He hears Hannibal in the bathroom, washing his hands. Then suddenly, he snaps awake to the sensation of a warm hand caressing his shoulder. He looks over, and there is Hannibal, grinning his pleasure. “Thus you return to life,” Hannibal declares.

Will turns his head, looks up at the ceiling. Still a bit dizzy, but feeling somehow refreshed. As though he has been filled up with something bright and then drained out, left sparkling. “Yeah,” he breathes. “That was...” he casts about for an appropriate descriptor. “That was amazing.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it.” Hannibal kisses Will’s shoulder and gets up. Offers his hand to Will.

Will takes it and lets Hannibal hoist him to his feet. Blood rushes back to his head, and he totters, but Hannibal steadies him. Gives him a brief little kiss on the cheek. Picks up his discarded robe and drapes it over Will’s shoulders. The silk settles cool against Will’s skin. He pulls it a bit closer around himself. Hannibal goes to the closet and retrieves a second robe, this one of seersucker. “Won’t you join me downstairs for a beverage?” he invites.

Will suddenly realizes how thirsty he is. “Yeah, definitely,” he answers, following Hannibal from the bedroom. Hannibal descends the stairs with fluid grace. Will follows more slowly, his legs still shaky.

In the kitchen, Hannibal makes melon-cucumber club sodas again. “What, no gin?” Will jokes.

Hannibal shakes his head. “We could, but I want you to be fully lucid for what I have to ask you next.”

Will lowers his glass. Regards Hannibal with some apprehension. “Okay.”

Hannibal takes a long drink. “Will,” he says slowly, “do you feel ready to go further with me?”

“Further?”

Hannibal nods, fixing Will with a piercing gaze. “We could stop having not-quite-sex, and start having sex. What I think you consider ‘real’ sex. Are you ready to take that step?”

Will stares down into his glass. Listens for a moment to its fizzing, to the ice clinking against the glass as his hand shakes. He raises it to his lips. Takes a long swallow. Sets it down on the counter. Licks his lips. "You mean...take my virginity?"

Hannibal tilts his head slightly. "I'd prefer not to think of it as 'taking.' It sounds so one-sided, so selfish." He takes another drink. "I prefer to think that, if you would like, we can share something tonight. Something that might have meaning for you. But only if you truly want to."

Will takes a deep breath. "I think..." he says, "I think I want to."

Hannibal sets his drink down. Crosses over to Will and takes Will's hands in his own. "I cannot do this if you *think* you want to, Will. I need you to be sure."

Will looks down at their joined hands. Licks his lips again. Looks up at Hannibal, finds those dark eyes searching. Summons the most confident voice he can and says, "I'm sure."

Hannibal reaches up and cups Will's chin. "Sure of what, Will?"

Will leans forward and kisses Hannibal deeply. "I don't want to be a virgin anymore, Hannibal," he says. "Please."

Hannibal smiles. Kisses Will back. "Then come with me." He takes Will's hand and leads him back to the bedroom.

Further

Chapter Summary

Hannibal leads Will into an entirely new stage of his life.

Hannibal shuts the bedroom door. Wraps his arms around Will's waist. Looks deep into his eyes. "Are you nervous, Will?" he whispers.

Will nods.

Hannibal grazes the tip of Will's nose with his own. "That's only natural. But you are in good hands."

"O...okay," Will stammers. "What do I do?"

Hannibal pulls Will closer. "You kiss me, Will," he says. "And I kiss you. When you're ready, you'll take off your robe and go to the bed."

"And...and then what?" Will breathes.

"I'll follow you," Hannibal answers, leaning his forehead against Will's. "We'll do something like we just did, earlier. I'll slip my fingers inside you, warm you up, get you ready. Would you like that?"

A warm flush begins to creep over Will. He nods.

Hannibal smiles. "Good. Shall I tell you what happens next?"

"Yes," Will whispers, captivated.

"I'll wait until you beg me," Hannibal purrs. "I'll wait until you're sure. And when you beg me, I'll enter you, slowly, gently. You'll take me in, and I'll let you have control. You'll ride me, Will, as fast and as hard as you like, and I'll stay there with you, be there with you, while you take your pleasure. And Will?" He cups Will's chin, runs his thumb across Will's lower lip. "When you come, I won't tell you to come for me, because when you do, it will be for yourself. How does that sound?"

Will's eyelids flutter. "It sounds...it sounds like something I want to do."

"Then kiss me," Hannibal whispers.

Will tips his head forward and favors Hannibal with a long, deep kiss. Hannibal's arms tighten around his waist, hold him close. Will follows suit, wraps his arms around Hannibal.

They press together, the warmth between them growing. Will breaks away from the kiss to catch his breath, but Hannibal's mouth finds his again, and he falls deep into another kiss.

Feeling bold, Will pulls his arms from around Hannibal and reaches for the belt of his robe. Unties it. Slips his hands inside Hannibal's robe and caresses his stomach. Hannibal breaks the kiss, quivering. Will continues to run his hands over the smooth skin and tight muscle until Hannibal is trembling all over, breath coming in long, avid waves. "Show me...show me what you want, Will," Hannibal pants.

Will kisses Hannibal's neck. Withdraws his hands from Hannibal's skin. Unties the belt of his own robe. Slips the silk from his body, drapes it over a chair. Reaches for Hannibal's shoulders and slides the robe away from them, pulls it from Hannibal's body. Hannibal takes the robe and lays it over the other chair. Will takes his hand and brings him over to the bed.

Suddenly shy again, Will asks, "What do I do now?"

Hannibal sits down on the bed. Leans over and pulls the bottle of lubricant and another condom from the drawer. Gives Will's hand a gentle tug. "Come sit next to me," he instructs.

Will complies.

Hannibal leaves the lubricant and the condom on the bed. Puts his arms around Will's shoulders and draws him forward. Kisses his face, his neck. Rests his cheek against Will's. Whispers into Will's ear, "I'd like to touch you, Will. Would you like that?"

Will presses his face into the crook of Hannibal's neck. Moves his hands to rest on Hannibal's hips. "Yes," he whispers.

Hannibal slides his hands down from Will's shoulders, across his sides. Brings them to Will's lap, caresses the ticklish skin along the inside of his thighs, making him shiver. Strokes his way up, brushes his fingers up the shaft of Will's cock. Will inhales sharply, presses his face deeper into Hannibal's neck. "More," he whispers.

Hannibal teases Will's cock, his touch light and easy, grazing the skin. Even under the barest touch, Will begins to harden. Hannibal smiles. Turns his head. Kisses Will's curls. Firms up his touch, slowly snakes his fingers around Will's cock. Grips it tight, drawing a breathy little moan from Will. Begins to stroke it with agonizing slowness.

"More," Will moans.

Hannibal speeds his stroking, bringing Will fully hard in seconds. Will's hand slips from Hannibal's hips to his groin, fumbles about for his cock, finds it, begins to give rhythmic squeezes that soon give way to pumping. Hannibal gives a little "Mmf" of appreciation and redoubles his efforts.

Will bites down on the muscle at the base of Hannibal's neck, drawing a surprised gasp and a little shiver from Hannibal. He slackens his jaw, releases Hannibal's flesh, runs his tongue over it instead. Hannibal gives a guttural groan, grips Will's cock more tightly. Will gives a little yelp.

Hannibal pauses. "Too much?"

"Don't stop," Will breathes, still pumping Hannibal's cock. "Please don't stop."

Hannibal goes back to work on Will, drawing helpless moans from him. Hannibal begins to moan along with him as Will continues to stroke his cock with a desperation that drives Hannibal wild with desire. "More?" Hannibal gasps.

Will gives a long, pitiful moan and slumps back, letting go of Hannibal's cock as he flops against the mattress. Spreads his legs. Draws his knees up. "Please," he begs. Hannibal releases Will's cock and retrieves the lubricant and condom. Prepares as before. Slips his fingers inside Will.

Will undulates on the bed, riding Hannibal's fingers with enthusiasm, moaning all the while. He clenches his fingers in the covers, knowing he'll come if he touches himself. He throws his head back and bites his lip, hard, trying to keep from screaming with pleasure. What comes out instead is a low-throated whine. Hannibal strokes himself, keeping pace with Will's thrusting against his hand. Will trembles with the effort of holding himself back, begins to sweat all over. Unable to help himself, Hannibal leans forward and licks drops of sweat from the insides of Will's thighs.

Will lets out a high-pitched wail. "Please," he keens, "please!"

"Please what, Will?" Hannibal asks, his voice thick and raspy.

Will moans. "Please...please fuck me, Hannibal."

Hannibal sits back, takes a long breath deep into his belly, removes his trembling hand from his cock. Slides his fingers out of Will, slowly. Pulls the condom from his fingers, inside-out, and drops it in the waste bin. Grabs another condom from the drawer. Unrolls it down his shaft. Pours lubricant. Tells Will, "Get up, onto your hands and knees."

Will pulls himself up onto quivering limbs, panting, dripping with sweat.

Hannibal positions himself behind Will, rubs Will's back gently with one hand. Will shivers. Hannibal slides the head of his cock up the back of Will's balls. Across his perineum. Back and back, to rest against Will's asshole. Lingers there a moment.

"Please," Will begs.

Hannibal keeps his hand on Will's back, pulls him a little. "Lean back," he says. "Go at your own pace. Bring me in."

Will breathes deeply. Concentrates on relaxing, on the feeling of desire raging hot throughout his body. He eases himself back, slowly, slowly, against the head of Hannibal's cock. Feels its warmth, even through the condom. Inhales, filling his chest. Exhales as he rocks back, lets the head of Hannibal's cock slip inside him. Feels a tingle creep over his whole body. Breathes in and then out again.

"Just like that, Will," Hannibal murmurs. "Slow and easy."

Will keeps taking full, deep breaths. Creeps back a little further on every exhale, encouraged by Hannibal's steady hand on his back, his quiet exhortations of, "Good," and, "Yes, like that." Finally, he holds the full of Hannibal's erection inside himself. He remains still except for his panting breath. Swallows. Whispers, "Now what?" Hannibal's cock pulses inside him, sending a wave of pleasure juddering through his body. His breath catches.

"Now," Hannibal says, rubbing slow circles on Will's back, "you ride me. Go slowly, at first."

Will rocks forward a tiny bit, then back. "It feels...it feels good," he breathes.

"Good," Hannibal says. "Good. Keep going."

Will moves forward again, slowly, until about half of Hannibal's cock is out of him, then rocks back. Moans at the feeling of Hannibal's cock filling him up, pressing against the gland inside. Begins to rock a bit faster.

"Mm, yes," Hannibal sighs as Will's ass slides up and down his cock. "Yes, Will."

Will's breath comes harder as he speeds up, until he is no longer gently rocking, but truly riding Hannibal's cock. Hannibal's slides his hand down from Will's back to his bouncing ass, resists the urge to slap it. "Will," he moans, "that's so good."

Will's moans become longer and higher as he takes Hannibal deeper inside himself, practically slams his ass against Hannibal's hips. Hannibal hangs on, shaking all over, now just as sweat-drenched as Will. "Oh please," he begs, "please, Will, may I fuck you?"

"Mmm, fuck me," Will groans. "Fuck me, Hannibal!"

With a long moan, Hannibal grabs onto Will's hips and drives deep into him. Will pitches forward with the force of Hannibal's bucking, collapsing onto his forearms with his ass in the air. He grabs a pillow and screams into it, letting its softness muffle his cries of pleasure.

Hannibal slows. "Am I hurting you, Will?" he asks.

Will turns his head, gasps out, "No. Keep going. Don't stop."

Hannibal works back up to his previous pace, spurred on by Will's stifled screaming, barely containing the urge to give himself up entirely, to pound into Will's ass with fevered fury. Will reaches his hand up from under the pillow and begins jerking himself mercilessly, his screams coming faster, becoming a chorus of sharp yelps. Hannibal's head goes absolutely dizzy at the sound, and he loses control, plunges into Will, comes in long, deep spurts. Will gives one final scream that slowly dies away to a groan as cum splatters onto his chest, his neck, the bedclothes, the pillow.

Hannibal slips out of Will and collapses next to him, lying on his back. Will slowly sinks down to lie on his side. Hannibal listens to Will's breath, coming in ragged gasps that soon begin to hitch and tremble. At the first sob, Hannibal shoots upright, puts a hand on Will's shoulder.

“Will?” he says, panicked. “Are you all right?”

“I’m f-fine,” Will gulps, rubbing at his eyes. “Really, I’m...that was...” He takes a deep, steadying breath. “It was intense.”

Hannibal massages Will’s shoulder. “Of course it was,” he murmurs. “The first time often is.” He sighs. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

Will nods, rubs his eyes again. “I’m okay,” he sniffles, “I promise.” He rolls over onto his back, his tears giving way to a dreamy smile. “I’m...I’m perfect.” His eyes flit over to meet Hannibal’s. “That was really great.”

Hannibal leans over and lays a kiss on Will’s lips. “I’m so glad you enjoyed it, Will.” He smooths sweat-dampened hair away from Will’s forehead. “Would you like to take a shower with me?”

Will rubs absently at his arm. “I...sure,” he says. “Yeah.”

Hannibal gets up from the bed, pulls the condom from his cock and drops it in the waste bin. Beckons to Will with a gentle smile. “Come with me,” he says.

Will gets up and follows him to the bathroom.

Hannibal sets the water temperature to Will’s liking, and lets him have the first turn under the stream. As Will closes his eyes and luxuriates in the warm water, Hannibal watches the rivulets course down Will’s body. Gives an appreciative smile. Takes up a cloth and lifts a sweet-smelling bar of soap to his nose briefly. Reaches around Will and wets the cloth. Lathers it with soap. “Here,” he says to Will, stroking a hand down his back.

Will opens his eyes. Reaches for the cloth.

Hannibal smiles. Shakes his head. “Let me,” he insists.

“Oh. Okay,” Will agrees. He steps out from under the stream of water.

Hannibal swabs Will’s shoulders with the soaped-up cloth, massaging into the muscle as he does so. Will gives a little groan of appreciation. Hannibal lingers over his shoulders for a moment before moving lower, pressing the cloth to Will’s back muscles and rubbing in lazy circles.

“That feels so good,” Will groans, eyes slipping closed.

“Good,” Hannibal answers.

Hannibal scrubs the full of Will’s back, his sides, his arms, re-wetting and re-lathering the cloth as needed. He takes especial care with Will’s hands, taking them between his palms and massaging gently, then rubbing down the length of each finger in turn. He makes his way back up Will’s arms, slides hands and cloth down Will’s spine, then kneels and begins

working on his ass. Works his way down Will's legs, lifts his feet like a ferrier shoeing a particularly fine stallion and massages them with the same care as he'd taken with Will's hands. Turns him and scrubs his chest, his stomach. Gently cradles Will's cock and balls, washes them with care.

Hannibal stands again, leans in and murmurs in Will's ear, "Would you like me to wash your hair?"

Will nods, too lost in the depths of relaxation to speak.

Hannibal rinses the cloth and hangs it on the rack at the rear of the shower. Reaches around Will and retrieves a bottle of shampoo, pours some into his hand. Begins at the crown of Will's head, working the liquid into a foam, pushing his fingers through the wet locks that are already beginning to curl again. Will groans pure pleasure as Hannibal scrubs deep against his scalp. Hannibal smiles to himself. Continues to knead at Will's scalp until his groans die away to deep, rhythmic breaths and his head lolls back.

Hannibal chuckles. "Let's rinse, before you fall down" he suggests.

Will turns his back to the stream, leans his head back into the water. Lets Hannibal run his fingers through his hair, making sure the last traces of lather wash away. Lets the water course down his body.

Hannibal gently pulls Will out from under the water again, takes a bottle of conditioner, applies it to his hair. Smooths it through his curls. Runs his hands over and over Will's hair, unable to get enough of the slick, springy texture.

Will gives a deep, contented sigh. Opens his eyes. "Do you want a turn? I could, uh. I could wash you. If you want."

"I would like that very much, Will," Hannibal answers.

Hannibal and Will slip past each other to switch places. Hannibal stands under the warm water, wets his entire body, steps back so that the stream falls only on his chest. Will takes up another cloth, lathers it, begins to gently wash Hannibal's body. He mimics Hannibal's earlier motions, massaging as he makes his way down Hannibal's back, his ass, his legs.

"Good, Will," Hannibal purrs. "That's very good."

Will blooms with pride, gently turns Hannibal to face him, continues his ministrations. He pauses when he comes to Hannibal's cock. Looks up to find Hannibal's dark eyes watching him. "Do you...do you want me to, um...?"

Hannibal reaches down, slips his fingers beneath Will's chin and tips his face up. "Dear, dear Will," he says. "I believe you may have drained me for tonight." He smiles. "And we're going to run out of hot water soon."

Will's mouth quirks into a lopsided grin. "Then I guess we'd better rinse off and get out of here."

“Quite right.” Hannibal takes Will’s hand and brings him to his feet.

They rinse quickly. Take turns toweling each other off, rubbing each other down with the same intimate care as with their washing. Will shyly avoids meeting Hannibal’s gaze, but can’t keep a smile from creeping across his face.

Hannibal takes both towels and hangs them up to dry. Covers up a yawn with the back of his hand. “It must be quite late,” he says, turning to Will.

Will nods. “Yeah.”

Hannibal glides over and takes Will’s hand. “Come on. Let’s get some sleep.”

Hannibal stops at the linen closet on the way back to the bedroom. Hands fresh sheets and pillowcases to Will, takes a clean blanket into his arms. They strip away the cum-stained bedclothes and replace them, then slip into bed.

Will sighs at the feel of fresh sheets against his freshly-showered skin, at the warmth of the body spooned up against his, at the languor dragging him down into sleep. Just as contentment begins to settle in his chest, something deeper blooms around it, swallows it up, and for a moment he thinks he might cry again.

He can’t remember the last time he felt so happy.

After

Chapter Summary

After their passionate night, Hannibal and Will spend time together. Hannibal and Abby have an important conversation.

Will rubs his eyes. Yawns. Turns over in bed. Finds Hannibal watching him.

“Good morning,” Hannibal says, dark eyes twinkling.

“Morning,” Will returns, stifling another yawn. “Is it still morning?”

Hannibal nods. “Just barely.” He reaches over and brushes a stray curl from Will’s forehead. “How are you feeling?”

Will shifts. “Uh...a little sore,” he admits.

Hannibal frowns. “Hm. I hope I wasn’t too rough with you.”

“No,” Will assures him hastily, “no, it’s fine. I was...it was...” he sighs, a goofy grin spreading across his face. “It was great.”

Hannibal gives him a sleepy smile. “Good. And how are you otherwise?”

Will runs a hand through his hair. “What do you mean?”

“I mean mentally. Emotionally.” Hannibal levers himself up on one elbow. “Do you feel like your mental furniture’s been rearranged?”

Will rolls over onto his back. Drums his fingers on his chest. Considers whether he feels any different now that he’s no longer a virgin, in some important way. He shifts his eyes to meet Hannibal’s. “I don’t know,” he says.

Hannibal nods. “That’s not surprising. These things can take time. But you’ll let me know if you have any difficulty with this, won’t you?”

“Yeah,” Will agrees. “Yeah, I will.”

“Good.” Hannibal sits up. Stretches. “Would you like some breakfast?” he asks.

Will suddenly realizes just how hungry he is. “Yeah, I’m starving.”

“And no wonder,” Hannibal says with a sly grin as he climbs over Will. “You exerted yourself quite a bit last night.”

Will huffs out a little laugh. "I exerted myself? What about you?"

"It was a big night for both of us." Hannibal reaches down and takes Will's hand. "Come on," he insists, "let me make you breakfast."

Hannibal makes French omelettes and toast, cuts up bananas and peaches and strawberries and drizzles them with honey. Will accepts a generously laden plate and, despite his attempts at restraint, plows through his food. Hannibal smiles over the rim of his coffee cup and rises from the table. Returns to the stove.

Will blinks. "What are you...?"

Hannibal turns the heat on under the pan again. Opens the refrigerator and takes out the eggs. "Making you another omelette," he answers.

"But you haven't finished yours," Will points out.

Hannibal smiles over his shoulder. "Will," he says, "you are my guest, and now my lover. Let me dote on you."

Will blushes down at his empty plate. He takes greater care with the second helping, takes his time spearing each bite, chews more slowly, takes in the full flavor of simple food made elegant by expert preparation. Finally sated, he leans back with a sigh. Finds Hannibal watching him. "What?" he asks gently, another blush creeping into his cheeks.

Hannibal tilts his head gracefully, a little shrug. "There is a sense of gratification in watching someone enjoy your work."

"Well," Will says, pondering how to phrase his thoughts. He says simply, "You're a really good cook, Hannibal." His eyes flit down, then back up. "Among other things."

Hannibal sips coffee. "I'm so glad you enjoy the things we do together, Will," he says. Smiles up over the rim of his cup. "I enjoy them as well." He puts his cup down. Fixes Will with a searching gaze. Will gulps. Hannibal softens a little. "Would you like to spend the day together?" he asks.

Will opens his mouth. Closes it. Nods. "I really would." His eyes flit up. "But I've got Abby today."

"Ah." Hannibal leans back, his posture relaxed. Considers. "Would you object to having her with us? We could still spend our time together."

Will brightens. "Yeah? You wouldn't mind her being around?"

"Not at all," Hannibal says with a gentle shake of his head.

"Then maybe we can meet up in a little bit and do something. She likes the park. Does that sound okay?"

Hannibal gives Will a dreamy smile. "It sounds lovely. Give me an hour?"

Will nods. "Sure." He looks around the kitchen. "You uh, you want help cleaning up or anything?"

"No," Hannibal says. "Go ahead." He comes around to Will's side and gives him a brief kiss. "I'll see you in an hour."

Abby bounds from the car with glee, her excitement nearly as great as Winston's. She begins to dash away, but stops short and looks back over her shoulder as Will calls warningly, "Abby."

"Come on," she urges as her brother and their guest step from the car, "I wanna go to the playground!"

"Let me lock up first," Will says. "Can you take Winston?"

"Yup," Abby chirps, accepting the leash. "Winston, down." The dog obeys, lies beside her with pert ears and wagging tail, waiting for the next command. When Will locks the car and gives her a nod, Abby gives the leash a tug and says, "Okay, let's go!"

Winston pops up immediately, and he and Abby trot towards the playground. Will and Hannibal follow at a more sedate pace, and when they catch up, Abby hands over the leash to Will and bounds away to the swings. Hannibal folds himself neatly onto a bench, and Will flops down beside him. Winston turns in a circle and settles near Will's feet.

Hannibal and Will take turns entertaining Winston and minding Abby. Eventually, Will looks at his watch, takes up the leash, and calls Abby over. "Time to hit the next stop," he says.

Abby gives a dramatic pout.

"I gotta take Winston to the dog park," Will explains. "You've had some time on the playground, now it's his turn."

"But I wanna stay here," Abby whines.

"Abby," Will says tersely, "I can't leave you alone up here."

"I can stay with her," Hannibal offers.

Abby looks from Hannibal to Will, hopeful.

"You don't mind?" Will asks Hannibal, shifting the leash in his hand.

"Not at all."

"Well," Will says hesitantly, "if you're sure..."

Hannibal looks down at Abby and smiles. “Go ahead, Will. We’ll be fine together.”

Once her brother has disappeared over the hill, Abby fixes Hannibal with a curious gaze, eyes frank and innocent. “What are you and my brother doing?” she asks bluntly.

Hannibal gazes back, inscrutable. “We are friends,” he says. “We spend time together.”

“Yeah,” Abby says, brushing hair away from her face, “but what are you really doing?”

Hannibal gives her a minute shrug. “As I’ve said, we spend time together.”

“Are you his boyfriend?” Abby chirps.

“Is that what your brother says?” Hannibal asks in a neutral tone, with a long, lazy blink.

Abby shakes her head. “No. But it would be okay if you were.”

An amused grin appears briefly on Hannibal’s face. “Would it?”

Abby nods emphatically. “Yeah. I like you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal leans forward, bringing his face level with hers, and gives her a smile. “I like you too, Abby.” He straightens again. “Would you like me to be your brother’s boyfriend?”

Abby nods. “Yeah. He likes you a lot, and you’re really nice to him. People aren’t nice to Will. Well, Mom and Dad are, and I am, but other people aren’t. He doesn’t have any friends since Alana moved away. And they stopped being friends right before she moved because he wanted her to be his girlfriend and she didn’t want to.” Her wide eyes latch onto Hannibal’s. “He’s been sad for a really long time, but when you’re around he’s happy.”

Hannibal makes a small sound of interest. “I’m glad I can bring him some happiness.” He pauses. Weighs something in his mind. Says matter-of-factly, “He brings me happiness as well.”

Abby flaps her arms and declares, “Then you should be boyfriends!”

Hannibal chuckles. “One needn’t be romantically linked to share happiness, Abby. It can be shared freely.”

Abby’s arms drop. “Does that mean you don’t want to be his boyfriend?”

“No,” Hannibal says simply, “it means I don’t *need* to be his boyfriend. There’s a difference.”

“But you do want to?”

Hannibal stands. “I want to think about it. Your brother is a complicated person. I have to be careful with him. Now,” he offers a hand to her, “we should go and find him, yes? Maybe we can convince him to stop for ice cream on the way home.”

Abby squints up at Hannibal. “Are you trying to bribe me?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” Hannibal answers.

Abby considers, chewing her lower lip. Takes Hannibal’s hand. “Okay.” She starts to walk towards the dog park, but stops short. “Will you tell me, if you do decide to be his boyfriend?” she asks.

Hannibal gives her hand a squeeze. “I will.”

Strife

Chapter Summary

Trouble in paradise leads to a journey into hostile territory.

Will lounges against the edge of the bed, enjoying the feel of Hannibal's arm draped casually around his shoulders. "So," he ventures, "my parents are out of town this weekend, and Abby's going to stay with the grands."

"Grands?" Hannibal asks.

"Our grandparents," Will explains. Turns his head toward Hannibal. "Maybe we could...I dunno. Do something?"

Hannibal squeezes Will's shoulder. "I'm afraid I shan't be available this weekend."

"Oh." Will frowns. "What are you, um..." he begins.

"I'll be traveling," Hannibal answers.

"With your aunt?"

Hannibal hesitates, and Will's posture stiffens. "With a friend," he says finally.

"I didn't..." Will stammers. The words *I didn't know you had other friends* skirl through his mind. But this seems rude.

Hannibal slips his arm from around Will's shoulders, regards him for a moment. "Will," he says, his tone gentle, "you're not the only one with whom I spend my time."

Will's brows draw together. "I know that," he lies. "I just..." Unable to contain himself, he bursts out, "Who is it?"

Hannibal tilts his head. "Why the interrogation, Will?" Nonchalant. Not affronted. Not defensive.

Will casts about for an answer he does not want to give.

Hannibal's leonine gaze stabs into Will. "Her name is Bedelia," he says. Calm. Casual.

Will balks. "*Bedelia*?" he exclaims. Bedelia. Beautiful, blonde, bitchy Bedelia DuMaurier.

"You know her?" Hannibal seems oddly unsurprised.

“I...yeah,” Will splutters. “She’s the worst!”

Hannibal quirks a brow. “If that is what you think, then I doubt you know her very well.”

Will draws away from Hannibal. “*You* don’t know her! She’s...she’s...” He cannot think of a denunciation that won’t cross a line. A sudden thought occurs to him. His eyes narrow, his gaze venomous. “Are you fucking her?”

Hannibal sits back, appearing perfectly comfortable. “Will,” he says, his tone firm. “What would it matter if I were?”

Will runs his fingers roughly through his curls, gets to his feet. “I can’t believe you,” he spits. Shakes his head, utterly dumbfounded. “Why are you telling me this?” Accusing.

The muscles just under Hannibal’s eyes tense almost imperceptibly. “You wanted to know,” he answers simply. “Do you want to know more?”

Will’s hands fidget. “What are you...what is that supposed to mean?”

Hannibal’s dark eyes flash, glacier-cold. “It means that perhaps you should not demand answers for which you are unprepared.”

Will’s head reels. He cannot keep his thoughts still enough to examine them, cannot find the words to express them, cannot even understand them fully as thoughts. He only knows he feels angry, and hurt, and embarrassed. And he hates Hannibal for making him feel that way. “Fuck you!” he bursts out.

Hannibal stands. “Will—” he begins, as if indulging a child.

Will rockets forward and shoves Hannibal. Hannibal takes this in stride, bending like a willow, gracefully accepting the force of Will’s little violence. “Fuck you!” Will shouts again. Flings an arm toward the door. “Get out of my room!” he yells, close to tears. “Get out of my house!”

Hannibal turns like a dancer, collects his things, and flows out of the room and down the stairs without a word.

In the wake of his departure, a vacuum of absence opens up, pulling the anger out of Will and leaving him empty. He’s thrown a tantrum. The very fact brings his embarrassment, and then his anger, roaring back. His face goes hot. He wants to hit something, throw something. Fall into a *real* tantrum, like a toddler. His eyes prickle and burn. His throat tightens around an animal sound of grief.

From the door, “Will?” Abby, curious. “Why are you yelling?”

“I’m not—” Will snaps. Gentles his voice. “I’m not yelling.”

“But I heard you,” Abby protests. “You said a bad word.” When this fails to get a rise out of her older brother, she looks around the room. “Where’s Hannibal?” she asks.

Fear hits Will like a punch in the stomach. He's sent Hannibal away. He blanches, pushes past his little sister and goes thundering down the stairs.

"Will!" she calls after him, irritated.

"Just—stay here!" he calls back, sliding to the front door and flinging it open. No one there. Panicked, he dashes out, runs down the driveway, looks up and down the street. No sign of Hannibal. He turns toward Hannibal's house. Hesitates, his gut wringing. Finally decides to move.

Will's limbs are clumsy, every nerve a-twang as his muscles fight between the urge to flee or to forge forward. The walk next door seems to take years, feels like crawling across a desert. But there is no oasis at the end of this crawl, only hostile territory. Will drags himself up the porch, pushes the doorbell with a trembling finger. His heart gallops breathlessly as he waits; it leaps right up his throat at the sound of footsteps approaching the door. He steels himself to apologize, opens his mouth as the door swings wide, and stammers out, "I—oh."

Not Hannibal. Instead, the beautiful face of Ms. Murasaki. "Oh, hello Will." Her smile crinkles the corners of her eyes.

"Where's Hannibal?" Will blurts. Then, ashamed at his rudeness, "I'm sorry. Sorry, I just. Um. Is Hannibal here?"

She shakes her head. "Haven't seen him all day. I thought he was with you."

"N-no. Uh...I guess I'll...I'll call him," Will finishes lamely. Remembers his manners. "Thanks. Have a nice day."

She beams. "You too, Will."

Will trudges from the porch back to the sidewalk as the door shuts behind him. Stands there, lost, looking out into the neighborhood, his heart aching.

Will stew in his room for the entire weekend, leaving only to use the bathroom or retrieve food from the fridge. His parents have thoughtfully left various covered dishes to sustain him. He eats them cold, staring at the window that faces Hannibal's. He leaves the blinds closed. He barely sleeps.

Just after midnight, as Sunday eases into Monday, his phone pings. He picks it up, suspicious, and taps on the message alert. His breath stops.

Hannibal's number. Hannibal's message.

There's only one way we fix this, the text reads. Meet me outside, now.

Will freezes. He does not want to fight Hannibal. Does not know if he even can. But he cannot do anything but obey. He slips into shorts and a tee shirt, pulls on a pair of sneakers without socks, lumbers down the stairs and out the door into the muggy night.

On the street in front of his house, Hannibal sits astride a sporty, Japanese-made motorcycle, helmet in hand and another tucked under his arm. Will's jaw drops. "What...?"

"Come with me," Hannibal commands.

Will points a thumb over his shoulder, back toward the house. "I have to lock up," he says.

"Quickly," Hannibal allows.

Will jogs back inside, retrieves his keys, steps back onto the porch, locks the door behind him. Timidly approaches Hannibal, heart hammering in his throat.

"Here," Hannibal says, offering a helmet, "put this on."

"Where are we—"

"Will." Not exactly a warning.

Will dons the helmet and climbs onto the motorcycle behind Hannibal. He hesitates for a moment, but the second the engine comes to life, he throws his arms around Hannibal and hangs on tight.

As they begin to climb the hill, Will suspects he knows where they are headed. The closer they draw to their destination, the surer he becomes. He has never been to the Du Maurier house, but he knows where it is.

It is more manor than house. High walls, stately gates. Night watchman in his guardhouse at the bottom of the drive. Hannibal exchanges a few words with the watchman, and the gates open. Will hangs on as they motor up the hill. Hannibal parks the motorcycle in the circular drive before the front doors, and pulls off his helmet. Will follows suit.

A ghost comes out to meet them. Some diaphanous thing in a floor-length white satin dressing gown, a study in ivory, crowned in impossibly well-coiffed golden hair. It glides out the front door and down to the drive, and Will catches a glimpse of slender bare feet. He cannot quite bring himself to gaze upon its face. Perhaps he will turn to stone if he does.

"Bedelia," Hannibal greets it.

"Hannibal," it returns. "And who is this you've brought?"

Hannibal's hand exerts warm, steadying pressure on Will's back, just between his shoulder blades. "I think he can speak for himself."

"Uh," Will says. "I'm Will. Will Graham."

"Well," Bedelia says, "come in, Will Graham."

Will passes over the threshold, scalp prickling lightly as he does so, and stops in the grand foyer.

When the door clicks shut behind him, he feels sealed in, as though he has entered his own tomb.

Three

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will find an unconventional way to heal the rift between them.

They speak French to each other while Will sits there, feeling left out and increasingly uncomfortable. Like a helpless bird being watched by a pair of cats. Their feline smiles make his skin crawl. He wants to shout at them, to tell them to stop talking about him—because he is certain they are—and to take him back home. He cannot fathom why Hannibal has dragged him out of bed in the middle of the night and up to a strange house to be mocked. Except that he suspects Hannibal simply wants to get back at him for their fight. Will's anger begins to build toward courage; he thinks about just getting up and leaving, walking back down the hill to his own home, his own bed.

But just as he plants his feet, the words “ménage à trois” trip from Bedelia's lovely lips.

Will's head jerks up, his eyes seeking Hannibal's.

Hannibal stares coolly back, a serene smile playing about his mouth. He gives no hints, no reassurances.

“I said,” Bedelia purrs, “how would you feel about a ménage à trois?”

“Uh,” Will stammers. “I don't...I mean...”

Bedelia chuckles a little, lays a slender hand on Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal, in turn, reaches forward and strokes Will's arm. “I think it will be good for you,” Hannibal says. “Good for us.”

Will blanches, then blushes. “I've never, um.”

Bedelia puts a graceful finger to her lips. Will shuts up. “Don't worry,” she says, eyes twinkling with mischief, “we'll be gentle.”

Hannibal squeezes Will's shoulders. “I'll be here with you, Will.”

Will looks back and forth between Bedelia and Hannibal. Settles his gaze on Hannibal. “What do I do?”

Hannibal leaves Bedelia's side and goes to Will, brushes his fine nose against Will's cheek. Gives him a light but lingering kiss. “Undress me,” he whispers.

Will reaches for the buttons of Hannibal's shirt with trembling fingers. Fumbles his first attempt. Hannibal leans forward and kisses him again, flicks his tongue against Will's lower lip. "Remember all we've done," he whispers against Will's mouth. Will's groin tightens. He slows his fingers, begins to unbutton Hannibal's shirt. Hannibal kisses Will's cheek, dips his head and kisses along Will's neck. Will pants, eyes beginning to drift closed. "Keep going," Hannibal encourages. Will undoes the last few buttons, flings Hannibal's shirt open. Runs his hands up Hannibal's sides, slips them into the sleeves at the shoulder and draws the shirt down Hannibal's arms. Pulls it from behind Hannibal's back and tosses it aside, staring defiantly into Bedelia's eyes.

Bedelia lounges, smiling lazily. "Don't stop," she says.

Hannibal nibbles Will's neck, and Will shivers. Reaches for the hem of Hannibal's undershirt. Hannibal leans back, lets Will pull the shirt up over his head and work it over his arms. Presents his chest and stomach for Will, inviting his touch. Will leans forward and licks the cleft of Hannibal's chest as he reaches down, takes Hannibal's belt buckle in his hands, tugs roughly. Hannibal gasps, leans further back as Will's tongue strays lower. His belly shivers as Will's tongue roves over his taut abdomen. He slides his legs forward, lies down on the floor under Will. Thrusts his hips upward when Will begins to unbuckle his belt.

Will bites Hannibal's navel, feels his cock throb at Hannibal's helpless whine. His hands work faster, unfasten, unbutton, unzip. He draws Hannibal's trousers down past his insistent erection, down past hips and thighs and knees, calves and ankles and graceful bare feet. Reaches up and tugs Hannibal's underwear down the same path. Works his body forward, kisses the insides of Hannibal's thighs, pulls a hungry moan from him.

His work complete, Will looks up at Bedelia.

"Very good," she says, her voice all velvet. "Now come and undress me."

Will gulps. Leaves Hannibal idly stroking his bare cock, crawls across the plush carpet to obey Bedelia's command.

It is infinitely simpler, infinitely more complicated to untie the sash that holds her dressing gown closed, to let gravity do its work on the satin, to watch it slide down her creamy shoulders and puddle about her hips, revealing pert breasts with nipples pink as strawberry mousse. Will cannot help letting his gaze travel downward, to the smooth plane of her stomach, to the neat thatch of golden hair that sits primly above naked clitoris and bare, rosy labia.

Bedelia's silky legs rub together as she extends a foot and presses it against Will's flagging erection. "Don't be afraid," she murmurs. Cups his cheek with one hand. Turns his head gently back and forth, inspecting. "Hannibal was right," she says; "you are indeed very pretty."

"Uh...thanks," Will stammers.

Bedelia smiles without showing any teeth. "You should get undressed."

Will begins to shuck out of his tee shirt, but her hand on his wrist stills his motions.

“Slowly,” Bedelia instructs. “Let me look at you.”

He slows, draws his shirt up over his head, ducks his face through, feels his curls spring against his face as he pulls his head out of the shirt. He lets his chest puff out a little as he tosses the shirt aside. Steals a glance at Bedelia. She smiles still. Withdraws her foot from his groin, tips her chin up a little, expectant, commanding him to continue. He reaches down and unbuttons his shorts, slowly draws the zipper down, slips out of the shorts and tosses them away as well. Hooks his thumbs in the waistband of his boxers. Teases for a moment. Pulls them down, bares himself to her approving gaze, feels his cock begin to harden again.

“Lovely,” Bedelia says, showing a hint of pearly teeth in this smile. Her eyes settle somewhere over Will’s shoulder. She inclines her head a few degrees in that direction.

Will follows her gaze to where Hannibal lies stretched out, watching them, working his cock. Will flushes a deep scarlet. Says to Hannibal, “I didn’t know you were...”

“Naturally,” Hannibal pants. Gives a beatific smile. “You are so, so beautiful, Will.” Hannibal rises to hands and knees. Crawls to them, looking every bit the apex predator. He pauses to wrap himself around Will from behind, press his erection into Will’s back, reach around and stroke Will’s cock. Will surges in his hand, flops back against his chest, moaning. “Yes,” Hannibal whispers into Will’s ear, “very good, Will.” He slows his strokes, kisses down Will’s neck as he slips his hand away. “I would have you, now,” he says, his voice husky. “If you will permit me, that is.”

Will gives an urgent nod. Bedelia produces a bottle of lubricant and a condom and hands them over to Hannibal. Hannibal prepares himself, then takes hold of Will’s hips with slick hands. Will shivers. “Come to me, Will,” Hannibal instructs.

Will eases himself back, letting Hannibal press into him slowly, gasping as little rills of pleasure trickle through his body. Hannibal lets Will take control, lets Will ride him at his own pace. He pulls gently at Will’s shoulders, strokes down his spine, encouraging him to arch his back, to show more of his body for Bedelia’s enjoyment.

Bedelia rises, her every motion fluid, and glides over to sit on the bed. Perched there, she looks every bit the goddess. Even if he is not ready to worship yet, Will does feel a sense of awe. He gazes at her with half-lidded eyes, watches as she parts her legs, dips a hand down, begins to touch. His cock throbs at the sight of her lips parting around a slow exhalation, her lashes fluttering, a warmth rising in her cheeks. He cannot tear his gaze away from her face, somehow, regardless of the work of her hands. Hannibal’s breath tickles warm across his neck, his cheek. “Do you like what you see, Will?” he asks. Brushes his fingers up and down Will’s tight erection. “I think you do.”

“Yes,” Will breathes. “Yes.”

“Shall we join her?”

Will nods, curls bouncing. Hannibal pulls out of him slowly, removes and discards the condom. Leads Will over to the bed. Bedelia makes room for them as they climb up. Chuckles lightly and then leans her head back as Hannibal slides forward on his belly, between her legs, and slips forward his tongue to taste her. Will watches her bask in the sensation, and then startles when her gaze suddenly pierces him.

“Come and kiss me, Will,” she commands.

He obeys, leaning forward to meet her mouth. The flavor of her lips is sharp and sweet, like Persephone’s pomegranate seeds. He draws a breath and returns for another taste. Her hand alights on his shoulder, follows the curve of his arm down, wanders to his thigh. Caresses inward, finds his cock. Will gasps against her mouth. She shudders and sighs against his.

Hannibal rises from between Bedelia’s legs and presses himself against Will. “Give him to me,” he whispers to Bedelia. She gives Will’s cock one last gentle stroke and lets go. Will moves to sink back into Hannibal’s arms, but Hannibal gently pushes him forward. “On your knees,” Hannibal instructs.

Will goes down on his hands and knees as Bedelia hands the lubricant and another condom to Hannibal. He arches with a low moan as Hannibal slips inside him again. His thighs and belly tighten, keeping his body taut against Hannibal’s thrusts. His eyes squeeze shut, then flutter open to find Bedelia stretched out before him, languid gaze locked on his, pleasuring herself again. He pants and whines as Hannibal reaches around and begins to work his cock.

“Yes,” Hannibal hisses, giving Will’s cock a fierce squeeze. “Bedelia,” he invites, “if you would please, prepare Will.”

Bedelia rolls toward the bedside table, pulls out another condom. Slowly tears open the packaging. Rests her chin in the crook of Will’s neck and reaches forward underneath him. Unrolls the condom down the length of his shaft. Turns her back to him and presents, on hands and knees.

Will’s breath huffs out. “What...what do I...”

“You must enter her,” Hannibal explains, still pumping away. Will moans his acquiescence.

Bedelia snakes her way under his arms and arches her back up against his chest. He lifts up a bit more, and she slides back until her bottom presses against his thighs. His cock rubs against the silky wetness between her legs, and he gasps. Hannibal’s thrusts become slow and shallow as Will and Bedelia adjust to each other. Bedelia grasps Will in her hand and guides him in, and he sinks into her with a breathy, pleading moan. Bedelia rocks back against him, drawing him in deeper. He loses himself in her, loses himself in between them both, caught on Hannibal’s cock at one end and in Bedelia’s cunt at the other. He gives himself up to them, lets them crush him together, lets himself be batted between them, tossed like a ship upon a stormy sea.

He feels it then: a fluttering, a pulsing that grips and then releases his cock. Bedelia makes a heavenly sound, and Will comes explosively. Bedelia rolls onto her back and opens her arms,

catching Will to her as he collapses. Hannibal follows, driving deep into Will for his final, shuddering thrust, and then he topples over onto the bed next to them.

Will can almost feel Bedelia smiling as she strokes his hair. Hannibal reaches over and joins, caressing Will's glimmering back. Will lets himself be petted, enjoys it even. Their hands run over him, eventually finding their way to twining together on his shoulders. Bedelia shifts, and Will shifts with her, until he is once again pressed between her and Hannibal. Hannibal's and Bedelia's arms drape over him. Their legs tangle with his. Completely ensnared, Will drifts off into a deep sleep.

A tinkling little sound snaps Will out of his slumber. Bedelia reaches over lazily and retrieves her phone from the bedside table, turns off the alarm.

Will sits bolt upright. "Oh shit," he hisses, "what time is it?"

Bedelia gives a feline yawn. "It's four," she answers. "You have plenty of time to get home."

Will rubs at his eyes. Reaches over to shake Hannibal's shoulder. His hand flails through empty air. He turns to find Hannibal already up and putting his clothes back on. "This has been a most lovely evening, Bedelia," he says, zipping up his motorcycle jacket.

"Good." She rolls over onto her back, turns her exquisite face to Will. "Was it most lovely for you?" she asks.

Will finds that words will not come to him. He nods.

Bedelia gives a smile that shows no teeth. "That's good, Will Graham," she says. Her eyes flit to Hannibal. "You'll see our Will home safely?"

Hannibal nods. "Of course. Come, Will."

Will stumbles from the bed. Begins to gather and don his clothes. Smooths his hair, for some reason. Mumbles, "Thanks. 'Bye," to Bedelia. Lets Hannibal take his arm and gently steer him toward the bedroom door.

"Oh, and Will?" Bedelia calls from the bed. Will turns. "You'll come to my party next week." Not an invitation. An order, no matter how softly made.

Will nods. Slips out the door with Hannibal. Trundles down the stairs and back out into the night. He puts on his helmet, takes his place on the bike, wraps his arms around Hannibal.

Thinks, *Our Will*.

The Party

Chapter Summary

Will attends a party at the Du Maurier house.

Will ambles up the long driveway to the Du Maurier house, toying with his keys and smoothing his flyaway curls by turns. As he crests the hill where the lights of the house spill across the stones, he stops his nervous fidgeting and stares. The doors of the house stand open, a yawning mouth into a gilded underworld. He breathes in. Breathes out. Screws up his courage and enters.

A great table looms large in the foyer. Will sidles up to it, curious.

On the table, there is a silver dish full of little white pills. Beside it is another dish filled with what look like postage stamps. Beyond both dishes is a silver tea service, paired incongruously with rank upon rank of little black sake cups. And everywhere, there is alcohol.

Bodies writhe and stutter, dart and mingle, rise and fall.

Hannibal and Bedelia sit at the center of the bacchanal. They perch atop a priceless table, holding hands and smiling down on the crowd like patron saints. Every now and again, Bedelia leans toward Hannibal to whisper something in his ear, and they share a prim, private laugh.

Will slogs his way through the storm of bodies and stands before the table, a supplicant.

“Will!” Hannibal calls cheerily, hopping down from the table. He offers his hand to Bedelia; she takes it and glides down to join him.

“So you came after all,” Bedelia purrs.

Will shrugs. “Yeah. Didn’t want to miss it.”

Bedelia and Hannibal exchange a bemused glance.

“Well,” Bedelia says, “did you stop by the table on the way in?”

“I...I saw it,” Will answers.

“And you didn’t partake?”

Will hesitates. Shakes his head. “What, um. What is all that stuff?”

Bedelia's eyes twinkle. "An experience," she answers.

"What?" Will asks, dumbfounded. Bedelia takes his hand and leads him back through the human hurricane, to land at the table in the foyer again.

"What kind of experience do you desire tonight, Will?" Bedelia asks.

"Uh," Will says. He walks down the length of the table, hesitant. At the far end, he spies a crystal decanter half-full of amber liquid. He picks it up, surprised at its weight, and turns to Bedelia with a raised brow.

"I see you've found the Scotch," she says, a mischievous smile still playing at her lips. "Not an adventurer tonight?"

Hannibal glides up behind her. "Not tonight," he answers for Will.

Will accepts a crystal glass of Scotch from Bedelia. Looks to the table, then back to her. "What are you having?" he challenges.

Bedelia gives him a devilish grin. "A party."

"That's not—" Will begins.

"That's not important," Hannibal shrugs. Raises a glass of blood-dark wine toward Will. Will gives the glass a most careful touch with his own, and watches as Hannibal takes a graceful sip of his wine. Will raises the crystal glass to his lips and quickly gulps down a mouthful of the amber liquid.

It tastes like a campfire on an autumn night. It burns his throat and settles warmly in his belly, opens up his nasal passages like a chimney for its smoky vapors. He coughs slightly, much to Bedelia's amusement, and takes a much slower sip. It is rugged, yet somehow inviting. Like a well-lit cabin in a deep wilderness.

"What do you think?" Bedelia asks.

Will nods. "I like it."

"Then you have excellent taste," Bedelia smiles. She takes his hand again. "Come and join the party."

Will wanders through the tangled forest of bodies, head light with whiskey-vapor, marveling. The halls and rooms are full of people, some of whom he knows from school, all of them in their varying depravities. A knot of teenagers crawls upon a rug, squawking their fascination with its pattern. A blonde girl, lost in breathy giggles, sinks her naked body against a fur coat, stroking it with hands and cheeks and bare breasts. At her feet, a boy who looks like a football player licks the intricately carved leg of a fainting couch. Will turns a corner, idly opens a door, and finds a writhing heap of people, all arms and legs, chests and stomachs and backs, copulating on top of a heavy antique pool table. His hurried steps take him away from

the room and back to the hallway, where he bumps into Bedelia. He manages not to spill his drink. Barely.

As ever, she smiles. “They’re quite mad,” she chuckles.

“What...” Will starts. Shakes his head. “What are they on?”

Bedelia turns her head to look into a room where two boys kowtow before a massive statue of a stag. Then she turns back to Will. “They’re on whatever they’ve chosen to unlock the doors to their own insanity. They’re on whatever gives them the excuse to live a waking dream. To probe the depths of consciousness with utter abandon.”

Will eyes her for a moment, his thoughts marshaling themselves through the fog in his head. “You never give a straight answer, do you?” he says. Immediately regrets it.

But Bedelia merely chuckles. “Walk with me, Will,” she purrs, turning.

Will gulps another mouthful of the autumn-flavored drink and follows.

The hallways seem to go on and on. Door after door, each hiding or revealing some Boschian tapestry of intoxicated abandon. Bedelia leads Will through the labyrinth at a stately pace. Unsure what to do with his hands, Will repeatedly lifts the glass to his lips and sips. The fog in his head thickens to smoke, bringing incongruous sensations—a lifting flight in the brain and a dragging stumble in the body. Yet he feels he could do nearly anything. He begins to understand the madness around him. Heat pounds in his cheeks, his chest, his belly. He opens and closes his mouth experimentally, finds he can barely feel his tongue. Snorts out a small laugh.

Bedelia throws wide a French door and they step into the muggy night. Will looks up to find the stars wheeling in the heavens. He shakes his head a little, but that makes them spin and dance even more. He parts his lips and tastes the air. It slips across his tongue, down his throat, turning the burn of alcohol from fire to ice. He shivers. Looks over at Bedelia.

She stands on the lawn, peering up at the sky. In the moonlight, she fairly glows. A cold and distant sight, a reflection of the moon’s bright face. Will’s breath stills, then quickens. Without his permission, his clumsy feet take him to where she stands. Without his leave, his mouth stammers out, “Bedelia? Do you, um...”

She turns her moon-bright face to him and says, “Did you know that people once believed that sleeping in moonlight would cause a person to go insane?” She turns back to the sky and murmurs, “Luna, the Latin word for moon. It’s where we get the word lunatic.”

“That’s...” Will casts about for a word. “Interesting,” he mumbles. Peers at her through his lashes. Shyness and Scotch slow his speech. “Do you think...I mean...when we...” He blows out a breath. “It was great. What we did.” Shifts his feet. Says in a small voice, “I really liked it.”

Bedelia, enigmatic as a sphinx, cunning as a fox. “I know.”

Will takes another sip of his drink. Finds some courage at the bottom of the glass. “Do you think we could do it again?”

Bedelia’s eyes glitter in the darkness. She stares without saying anything. Will becomes steadily more uncomfortable. Just when he feels he would do anything to escape her gaze, she tilts her head so that a pretty lock of golden hair brushes her shoulder and says, “We need Hannibal, don’t we?”

Will’s heart gives a hopeful little jump. “Yeah. Yeah, we should get Hannibal.”

Bedelia folds her arms loosely around herself. “I don’t think he would.”

Will hesitates. “Why?”

Bedelia sighs. “He doesn’t need us. Either of us. It doesn’t matter how we feel about him, Will, the bare, honest truth is that he doesn’t need us.”

Heat blooms in Will’s chest, his face. He wants to strike back at those words, declare them false, but they burrow into his brain. A sound almost like a whimper rises in his throat.

“Poor Will,” Bedelia sighs again. “Poor, dear Will.” She takes a languid step closer to him. “I won’t say he’s using you. That would be unkind. And I think he genuinely enjoys you. And me. But he needed us at peace, that’s all.”

Will gulps in air. Begins to search for a savage retort. But something she’s said nags at him. He considers. “Were you mad,” he asks, “when you found out about me?”

Another long pause. “No,” she says. Does not elaborate.

Will opens his mouth to say something, but stops breathing. He stares, attempting to formulate a thought, but the anger coming to a boil inside him forms a wall around his brain. Finally, he bursts out, “Bullshit! You...you, you,” he shakes a finger at her, “you’re nothing *but* bullshit! You just...you just...”

Bedelia tips her chin up. “Continue.”

Will throws his head back dramatically. “Come on! Seriously? You’re just gonna...I can’t.” He turns away. “I can’t.”

Will stalks back into the great house, looking for Hannibal. He finds a bottle of whiskey instead, and plunges back into the labyrinth.

Will blinks up at the ceiling and slides deeper into the leather armchair. He can no longer feel his face, but for a prickling heat. His arms slump against the leather; his feet sit heavy on the floor, as if to anchor him in place as the room spins around him. Each time he blinks, the room begins a new revolution, but if he closes his eyes, it continues its whirling unseen.

“Will?” Hannibal’s voice, velvet-soft.

Will rolls his head slowly forward. Hannibal's face seesaws into his field of vision. "Hannibal," he slurs.

Hannibal reaches out a hand to touch Will's face, but Will jerks his head away, and immediately wishes he hadn't. A spike of pain accompanies the dizziness this time. He grimaces. Braces his hands on the arms of the chair. Hoists himself to his feet and sways there. "I'm leaving," he declares.

"Will," Hannibal says again. Will staggers into him, falls into his arms. "You're in no fit state to be going on your own," Hannibal murmurs into Will's ear. "Let me take you home."

Tears prickle in Will's eyes. He shoves Hannibal away and lurches for the door, stumbles down the hallway. Hannibal follows at a sedate pace, his face unreadable.

Will tumbles into a hedge and tries in vain to right himself. Hannibal hooks an arm around Will and hauls him upright. Will tries to push Hannibal off, to insist that he can walk on his own, but he begins to fall again. Instinct kicks in, and Will clings to Hannibal.

"Will," Hannibal says patiently. "I'm going to help you. We don't have much further to go, but you can't do it on your own."

"I'm fine," Will slurs, pitching forward. Walking down the long hill from Bedelia's house has been like riding a roller coaster; the sidewalk seems to wobble and jump beneath his feet, tilting him suddenly and making his head spin.

"Of course," Hannibal agrees, knowing better than to argue with someone as disastrously drunk as Will. He sways gracefully along with Will's shambling. "Will," he asks, "are your parents home?"

"Yeah," Will hiccups.

"Then we'd better take you back to my place."

"I wanna go home," Will states. "I don't feel good."

"I understand," Hannibal nods. "But you will undoubtedly get into a great deal of trouble if your parents see you in this state."

"Mmh," Will concedes, stumbling.

"We're nearly to the car," Hannibal assures him. "Give me your keys."

Will paws at his pockets, finally fishes the keys out, immediately drops them. Hannibal's hand shoots out to catch them before they hit the pavement. The sudden motion jars Will, and his legs almost go out from under him. Hannibal keeps hold of him, keeps him upright, readjusts. Once he has Will relatively stable again, he says, "All right. Let's get you to the car."

“I’m sorry,” Will groans into the toilet just before he begins vomiting again.

Hannibal rubs Will’s back. “There’s nothing to be sorry for, Will,” he soothes.

Will coughs up bile and spits. Accepts a glass of water from Hannibal. Takes a sip. It aches in his stomach for a few seconds, then rushes back up. He doubles over, and Hannibal reaches over to sweep Will’s hair away from his face. “Sorry,” Will repeats once he’s finished.

Hannibal strokes his hair, offers the glass of water again. Will sips, and this time it stays down. He slumps back from the toilet, falls against Hannibal’s chest.

Hannibal wraps his arms around Will and cradles him. “You keep apologizing,” he says. “You don’t need to.”

Will sighs deeply. “I fucked up,” he slurs. “I’m too drunk.”

“You are very drunk,” Hannibal agrees, “but we were at a party. That’s kind of the idea, isn’t it?”

Will’s head lolls back as he looks up at Hannibal. “You’re not drunk,” he observes.

Hannibal shrugs. “I don’t overindulge.” He strokes Will’s hair. Pushes the glass of water at him again. “Here,” he says, “drink all of this. Slowly.”

Will sips at the water, eventually getting all of it down. Hannibal rescues the glass from his clumsy fingers before he can drop it. “Sleepy,” Will slurs.

Hannibal takes Will by the shoulders and sits him up, pausing for a moment to make sure Will can remain semi-upright on his own, then gets up. He flushes the toilet, fills the water glass again, and hands it over to Will. “One more glass,” he instructs.

Will rubs a hand across the back of his neck, lets it flop into his lap. He takes the glass and drains it in a few gulps.

“Good,” Hannibal says. “Do you want to take a shower?”

Will shakes his head. Winces at the concussive headache beginning to creep in. “Just wanna go to bed.”

Hannibal nods. Clasps Will by the elbow and levers him to his feet. Slips his shoulder under Will’s arm and guides him down the hall to the bedroom.

Will flops into the bed with a groan. Hannibal sits down next to him and asks, “How are you feeling?”

Will hiccups. “My stomach hurts,” he says. “My head hurts.”

Hannibal tucks a strand of hair behind Will’s ear. “Are you still feeling sick?”

Will gives a messy sigh that threatens to become a snore. “Mm-mm,” he answers.

Hannibal leans over and strokes Will’s shoulder. “Will,” he murmurs, “are you going to sleep in your clothes?”

Will begins to struggle out of his jeans. He pushes Hannibal’s hands away when he tries to help. After a few minutes, he manages to extricate himself, and slips his legs beneath the blankets.

Hannibal takes Will’s jeans and folds them neatly over a chair. Removes his own shirt and trousers and hangs them in the closet. Slides into bed behind Will. Pulls the blankets up over them both. Smooths Will’s hair back and places a tender kiss on his neck, just below his ear. “Good night, Will,” he whispers.

Will gives a hitching little snore.

Will wakes with a sour stomach and a slamming headache. He groans and rolls over, thankful that the curtains are shut and the room is relatively dark. Then it strikes him—the memory that he is in Hannibal’s room, not his own.

“Shit,” he exclaims, jolting upright. The room spins. A rail spike of pain drives into his skull. His stomach bucks. He dashes down the hall to the bathroom, barely making it in time to double over in front of the toilet.

Hannibal appears in the doorway just as he finishes throwing up. “Will?”

“I gotta get home,” Will says, frantic. “My parents—”

“I texted them last night,” Hannibal says.

“You...?”

“I used your phone. I hope you don’t mind. They know you’re here, and they think you had a migraine last night. That will explain why you’re not feeling well.”

Will melts with relief. Flushes the toilet. Goes to the sink, washes his hands, and rinses out his mouth.

“I’ll make you breakfast,” Hannibal offers.

Will blanches. “I don’t know if I can eat anything.”

Hannibal gives a little shrug. “You may feel differently after a shower. And some coffee. Let me bring you a cup.”

“Oh...okay,” Will agrees.

“Cream and sugar?”

Will shakes his head gingerly. "I think I want it black."

Hannibal nods and disappears, returning shortly with a beautiful cup full of steaming black coffee, on a matching saucer.

Will takes the cup and saucer with careful hands and breathes in the dark, bitter aroma of the coffee before taking a sip. The robust flavor banishes some of the sour taste from his mouth. The warmth of the liquid flows through him, easing some of the soreness of his stomach and diminishing his headache. He gulps the rest of the coffee down as quickly as he can without burning his mouth.

"More?" Hannibal asks.

Will shakes his head. "Maybe in a minute. I'm gonna take a shower first."

Hannibal nods. Accepts the cup and saucer back from Will. Heads back toward the kitchen.

The smell of toasting bread greets Will as he shuffles into the kitchen. His stomach gives a timid rumble. Hannibal looks up from cutting more slices from what is clearly a homemade loaf. Gestures toward the French press and the waiting cup next to it. "Please help yourself, if you would like some more coffee."

"Thanks." Will pours himself a cup and leans against the counter.

Hannibal goes back to slicing the bread. "Your toast should be ready in a moment," he says. Gestures to a fruit bowl on the kitchen island. "And we have bananas as well. Very easy on the digestion."

Will plucks a banana from the bowl, peels it. Takes a cautious bite. His stomach does not rebel. As he finishes his coffee and the banana, his toast pops up. Hannibal transfers the toast to a plate and hands it over. "What do you take on your toast?" Hannibal asks.

Will lifts a slice to his mouth. "I think I'd better eat it plain."

Hannibal nods. Puts two more slices of bread into the toaster. "Would you like to contact your parents? Let them know you'll be home soon?"

"Shit," Will says around a mouthful of toast, fumbling for his pocket. "Yeah. I should do that." He retrieves his phone, sets his toast down on the plate, and fires off, *Still at Hannibal's. Just got up. Home soon.*

Immediately, from his mother, *OK. How are you feeling? Any better?*

He tells just enough truth to reinforce Hannibal's earlier lie on his behalf. *Still sensitive to light and noise. But yeah kinda better.*

From his father, *OK. Hurry home. Worried about you.*

Will do. Love you.

From his mother, *Love you too, hon.* And from his father, *You too.*

Will finishes up his toast and gulps down a third cup of coffee. Begins to feel somewhat human again.

Hannibal nibbles at his own slice of toast. “Would you like me to walk you home?” he asks.

Will pauses, caught off-guard by the gallant offer. “Um,” he says. “Sure.”

Hannibal puts his half-eaten toast back on the plate. Pulls a cloth napkin from a drawer and covers the plate. Sets it on the counter for later. “Shall we?”

Will sets his dishes on the counter next to the sink. “Okay.”

The daylight outside knifes through Will’s head, making him feel miserable all over again. Thankfully, the walk to his home is short. He opens the front door, steps through with Hannibal.

His mother appears on the upstairs landing, followed soon by his father. “Hey, sweetie,” his mother says, starting down the stairs.

“Hey,” Will answers.

His father follows his mother down. “You feeling any better, champ?”

“A little bit.”

“What happened?” his mother asks.

Will’s heart stops for a second. He hasn’t prepared for this. “Uh. I don’t know. Just kind of came out of nowhere.”

His mother frowns. “Why didn’t you come home, sweetie?”

Will’s mouth hangs open in the face of this barrage of questions.

Hannibal steps in to rescue him. “He was incapacitated, Mrs. Graham,” he answers. “I did what I think you would have done—gave him some pain reliever and put him to bed.”

“But we could have done that *here*,” Will’s father insists. “He should have been home.”

Hannibal nods once, in deference. “My apologies, Mr. Graham. If this happens again, I’ll bring him home straightaway.”

Mrs. Graham puts a hand on her husband’s chest. “We’re not mad, Hannibal,” she says. “We were just worried. And hello, by the way, and thank you for taking care of our son.”

Mr. Graham relaxes a little. “Right. Yes, thank you.”

“It was no trouble,” Hannibal says. Turns to Will. “I’ll say goodbye, then.” Turns to Will’s parents. Acknowledges, “Mr. and Mrs. Graham.”

“Thank you, Hannibal,” Mrs. Graham says again.

Hannibal nods. Steps across the threshold. Will waves, shuts the door.

Enjoyment

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal discuss their current state.

Will's hangover has mostly passed. His parents have stopped fussing over him, at least, and allowed him away from cold compresses and darkened rooms, and out of doors. His feet take him to Hannibal's without his head's full attention—it is preoccupied with the shift in the weather evident now that he has left the house. The darkening sky seems to have sucked the air away, leaving everything still and silent. The oppressive heat still blankets the neighborhood, but there is a certain expectant quality to it, as though it's gathering itself for something. Will scents the air, finding a faint, crisp tang there. His feet hurry their steps.

Hannibal appears after a few sharp knocks, and ushers Will in. Shows him to a seat at the dining room table. "How are you feeling?" he inquires.

"Uh. Better, I guess," Will answers, rubbing the back of his neck. "Still kinda...off."

Hannibal nods. "Would you like a beverage?"

"As long as there's no alcohol in it."

"No alcohol," Hannibal promises, gliding into the kitchen and returning with a tray bearing a pitcher of lemonade, a small decanter of tawny liquid, and a glass bottle of seltzer water. This he places in the center of the table, then turns to the bar cart and retrieves two glasses.

"What's in the, uh," Will nods his head toward the decanter. Hannibal follows his gaze.

"This is ginger syrup," he says. "Good for stomach troubles." He lays his fingertips on the top of the seltzer bottle. "Good for hydration, of course." He lifts the pitcher of lemonade and gives Will a roguish smile. "Good for summer afternoons, don't you think?"

Hannibal pours lemonade into a glass, stirs in a touch of ginger syrup, and adds ice-cold seltzer water. This he passes to Will, then makes a glass for himself. Will takes a sip of his drink. The heat of the ginger and the bite of the tart lemonade combine to give the libation a medicinal quality that is not unpleasant.

Outside, thunder rumbles low in the sky. Will looks up at a window, sees the day darkening further. "There's a storm coming," he murmurs.

Hannibal follows his gaze. "Indeed." He sips at his drink. Takes a seat across from Will. "I do enjoy storms. They remind me of the indifference of nature. The savagery of it."

“Sailing in a storm,” Will says. “It’s like that.”

Hannibal nods. “I can imagine. Being on the sea, far enough from shore that all you can see around you is the vastness of the great water. Horizon to horizon. The infinite, expressed in concrete terms. Knowing it could swallow you into invisibility; that you might never be found. And then it rises to do just that, in collusion with the sky. Battered between two infinities...I’m sure there’s nothing like it.”

Will peeks at Hannibal, finds dark eyes fixed on his own, looking like those of a starving man at a feast. A little shiver runs down his neck, his back. “Sounds like you kinda want it to happen to you,” he says.

Hannibal shrugs, and his face drops back into its usual look of placid enigma.

Eager to change the subject, Will comes up with, “Thanks for, y’know...taking care of me.”

“Of course,” Hannibal says. Then, after a few beats of silence, “That was quite a party.”

Will snorts. “Yeah. Yeah, I guess so.” Half-hazed recollections, images of maddened bodies in various states of undress, skirl incomprehensibly through his mind. A thought occurs to him. “What was all that stuff on the table?”

Hannibal leans back comfortably. “Ah. So you have some memory of the night.”

“Yeah, I...” Will comes to the end of his capacity for an answer and merely shrugs.

Hannibal answers, “Ecstasy, LSD, mushroom tea.” He takes a sip of his drink. “There was also cocaine available, upon request.”

Will’s brows shoot up. “I...wh...what?” he stammers.

Hannibal’s eyes flick up over the rim of his glass, his gaze briefly touching Will’s. “As I said, that was quite a party.”

Will turns his glass around and around in his hands. “Did you...did you do any of that?”

Hannibal shakes his head. “You may or may not remember what I said last night about overindulging.”

Will gives a small nod. “Yeah. You don’t do it.”

Hannibal leans forward, folds his arms on the table. “What else do you remember?”

Will scrubs at his eyes with the heel of his hand. Thinks. Shakes his head. “Not much. I think...I think I talked to Bedelia.”

Hannibal remains impassive, but Will can tell his interest is piqued. “Oh?” is all he says.

“Yeah,” Will goes on, squinting. “I think maybe...we argued? About something?”

Hannibal takes a sip from his glass without taking his eyes off Will.

Will digs deeper into hazy memories. Scrunches up his face in concentration. “I think we argued...” he looks up at Hannibal, “about you.”

Hannibal takes a longer drink, then sets down his glass. Swallows. “I can’t say I’m entirely surprised, Will.”

A jag of annoyance stabs at Will’s chest. “Yeah?” he challenges.

Hannibal seems to ignore his tone. “Feelings can become complicated when one takes a new lover,” he explains. “Especially when the old lover is still involved. And Bedelia,” he tilts his head a bit, smiles a bit. Will scowls. “Bedelia likes to play with her food, I think.”

Will’s head rocks back, his face a mask of disgust. “I’m not...I’m not *food*,” he spits. “I’m...like...I’m a *person*.”

Hannibal reaches across the table for Will’s hand, but Will snatches it away. Hannibal leaves his hand on the table, relaxed, as though he meant to simply rest it there all along. “I know this, Will,” he says.

Will’s eyes narrow. Despite the nervous pounding of his pulse in his throat, he manages to ease out, “...Do you?”

Hannibal leans back in his chair. “What do you mean?”

Will licks his lips. “I think...I mean...are you using me?”

Hannibal’s face relaxes, as though he finds Will’s half-accusation pleasant. “Using you for what?”

Will opens his mouth, but finds his throat blocked and his mind blank. “For...” He searches. Grasps. Comes up with, “For sex.”

Hannibal picks up his glass again. “No,” he says simply.

“Well then,” Will stammers, baffled, “what...what is this? What we’re doing? Why are you doing it?”

“Will,” Hannibal gives a wide, genuine smile. “Do you remember the first time we kissed?”

Will blushes despite himself, hearkening back to that sunny afternoon, to Hannibal’s mouth, wine-sweet, on his. “Yeah.”

Hannibal’s cunning eyes, dark as the storm outside. “And do you remember what we did after?”

The blush creeps down Will’s neck, warming his chest and belly and groin. “Yeah.”

Hannibal sips his drink and sets the glass down gently. “And what did I say to you that day, about sexuality?”

Will rubs the back of his neck. “That, um...that it’s complicated, I guess.”

Hannibal nods. “And what did I say about us?”

Will looks up to meet those dark eyes. “That...that it’s just you and me. It’s just us.”

Hannibal gives him a small smile. “Precisely. Will,” he reaches for Will’s hand again; this time Will does not pull away. “This is us. We enjoy one another.”

“Is that it?” Will frowns. “We just...I mean, you make it sound like we’re both using each other.”

Hannibal shakes his head, emphatic. “Will. It is more than you’re making it out to be.” He squeezes Will’s hand, strokes it, looks deeply into Will’s eyes. “We reach for each other and thus are found,” he says. “We bask in one another. We each drink deeply of the other.”

Will’s breath quickens. He tries to ignore it. Licks his lips. He wants to be angry, but he can’t muster the feeling. Not when Hannibal’s eyes hold his heart hostage.

Hannibal slides from his seat, still clasping Will’s hand, and gets on his knees before Will. “We find a heady pleasure in each other’s company,” he says, his voice growing husky. “We send one another into madness. We probe each other’s depths. And yes,” he lifts Will’s hand to his lips and kisses it with courtly grace, “we enjoy each other.” His eyes twinkle. “I very much enjoy you, Will.” His gaze grows sharp again. “Do you enjoy me?”

Will’s pulse beats in his veins like a bird against a cage. “Yes,” he whispers.

Hannibal lifts Will’s hand to his lips again, and takes one of Will’s fingers into his mouth. Will’s pulse drops straight into his groin, bringing him hard in seconds. He takes in a sharp breath as Hannibal’s tongue darts and plays against his finger, suggesting, promising. Hannibal’s other hand slides to Will’s crotch, caresses his erection. Will’s head slumps back even as his free hand becomes frantic, fumbling at button and zipper and fabric within. He draws his cock out, spreads his legs wider, relinquishes himself to Hannibal’s grip.

Hannibal’s mouth finds its way from Will’s finger to his cock. Will lets out a soft little moan and grips the arms of the chair as Hannibal sucks and licks. His eyes flutter as a feeling of pressure builds inside him, becoming more and more urgent. He breathes out another moan, but far from relieving the pressure, it heightens it. He pants against it, brings his head forward, looks down at Hannibal’s head bobbing on his cock. The sight sends a wild cry spiraling out of him, and Hannibal bobs faster. The pressure builds until Will feels he might burst, and he comes with a suddenness that makes him gasp in surprise.

Will’s head lolls back. His arms drop limp at his sides. He sits, trembling, his breath slowing over time from a mad rush to a sleepy sigh. His eyes drift open at the feeling of something soft and damp stroking at his cock. He looks down and finds Hannibal wiping him gently with a small towel.

“You...you don’t have to...” Will starts.

Hannibal smiles up at him for a moment, then returns to his work. “I would like to,” he says.

“Oh. Okay,” Will mumbles.

Hannibal finishes wiping Will down, folds the towel neatly and disappears to drop it into a hamper. Will stuffs himself back into his boxers, zips and buttons his shorts, and looks up just as Hannibal returns to the dining room.

“Did you enjoy that, Will?” he asks.

Will nods.

Hannibal stalks to Will’s side, leans down, cups his chin in a slender hand, and lays a soft kiss on Will’s lips. “I enjoyed it as well,” he says. He straightens. Extends a hand to Will. Pulls him to his feet. “If you would like,” he says, voice impassive but predator eyes alight, “we could go upstairs and enjoy each other some more. Would you like that, Will?”

Will nods again.

Hannibal smiles. Extends a hand to Will. “Then come with me,” he instructs.

Will obeys.

Courage

Chapter Summary

With some guidance from his little sister, Will comes to an important decision.

Will lies on the couch, toying with his phone, as Abby sits on the floor watching cartoons. He wants so badly to text Alana, to get her back not as a potential girlfriend, but just as a friend this time. He wants—needs—someone to talk to about Hannibal.

His nights have become restless, his days desperate. He wants to spend every minute with Hannibal. There are days when he yearns to be touched, tasted, teased, taken. There are nights when he lies awake, driven mad by memories of their time together, touching himself and stifling his cries. There are days and nights when they make new memories, both sensual and sweet.

Hannibal brings delightful homemade treats for the Graham family. He makes Abby's favorite cookies, makes dog biscuits for Winston. He accompanies them on outings. He has Will over for sumptuous dinners and ravenous lovemaking sessions. Every time Will falls asleep in his arms, he feels brimful with happiness and crushed with sadness all at the same time. And he suffers in his confusion.

Alana was so good at sorting out other people's feelings. She could always tell him exactly what he should do, even if he didn't always do it. She hadn't seemed surprised when he'd tried to kiss her. But that moment, that one foolhardy moment, had ruined their relationship. And then she'd moved away. Now he has no one to tell about this Earth-shattering change in his life.

What would she think of him now? The guy who'd gone from an awkward virgin who'd tried for his first kiss at seventeen and been shot down, to a guy who'd not just kissed, but sucked and fucked and had a threesome and partied at the DuMaurier mansion and ridden a motorcycle and had a secret lover? Would it impress her, or disgust her? Either way, she'd be surprised.

He sighs and puts his phone back in his pocket. Rubs at a spot between his brows where a headache is beginning to stir. Turns to the TV and finds Abby staring at him.

"What?" he says. Casual. Calm.

"You look sad," she observes.

Will starts to deny it, but then chews it over and admits, "Yeah, I guess I am a little sad."

"How come?" Abby asks.

Will scratches his head. "I guess...I dunno. It's just how I'm feeling today."

Abby tilts her head. "Is it because of Hannibal?"

Will's heart judders to a halt. "Uh?" he blurts.

"Well," she says, in a tone that implies that he's being dense, "you two are always together, and you're always happy when he's around, and you're not together today, so you must be sad."

Will stares, marveling at her insight. "Huh. I think," he dithers, unsure how much to reveal. Decides to put some trust in his little sister. "I think you might be right."

She scratches her nose. "So is he gonna be your boyfriend now?"

Will blushes. "I dunno."

"Do you want him to?"

Will rolls back onto his back, to hide his face a little. "I uh...maybe."

Abby flaps her arms and sighs. "Will," she says. "Either you do or you don't."

"It's not that simple, Abby," Will says, smoothing a stray curl out of his eyes. "Grown-up emotions are complicated."

Abby rolls her eyes. "Grown-ups *make* things complicated. It's dumb." Will doesn't answer. Abby pokes him. "You like Hannibal, right? Like, *like*-like him."

Will's face blooms with heat. "Yeah," he admits.

Abby nods. "And he likes you too."

"I guess so," Will says. "Maybe."

"Ugh. Will." Abby slouches, exasperated. "He definitely likes you. You guys are like...dating!"

Will blanches. How much does she know? "I mean," he ventures. "What do you mean by 'dating?'"

Abby flops backward onto the rug. "He keeps bringing you presents, and you go out on like, dates. Like to the park and stuff. And he keeps making you dinner." She sits up again. "And he looks at you all funny when he thinks nobody's watching. Like," she pantomimes an exaggerated, swooning sigh. Stares pointedly at Will. "He likes you." Her tone has the finality of a gavel strike.

Will rubs the bridge of his nose. Begins to reply. Rethinks. "So..." He hesitates. Turns his head. Looks over at his sister. "So what do I do?"

She blinks. “You have to tell him, right? Just ask him if he wants to be your boyfriend.” She pops up to her feet. “He’ll say yes.”

Will props himself up on an elbow. “You really think so, huh?”

Abby nods. “Yeah.”

Will levers his body into a sitting position. Takes in a deep breath and blows it back out again. “Okay,” he says, partly to himself. “Okay.” He glances at his sister, and anxiety twists his brows. “Do me a favor and don’t tell Mom and Dad yet, okay?”

Abby gives her brother an emphatic thumbs-up. “You got it.”

An idea occurs to Will. “They don’t um...they don’t, like...suspect? Anything?”

Abby shakes her head, sending her hair whipping around her face. “Nope. They think you’re just friends. I hear them sometimes, when they think I’m not around, and they’re like, ‘Oh, it’s so nice Will has a friend, especially a nice boy like Hannibal.’ They’re in love with him, too. ‘Oh, look at this pie Hannibal made, it’s so pretty, he’s so thoughtful, he’s so handsome, he’s so smart.’”

Will grins. “And what do you think about him?”

Abby shrugs. “I like him. He’s nice. And he’s nice to you. And Winston likes him. It’s okay with me if you date him, or marry him, or whatever.” She takes her brother by the shoulders and shakes him playfully. “Just do it!” she commands, drawing out the syllables.

Will can’t help but laugh. “Okay, okay, I’ll do it. I’ll...” his breath clenches in his throat, “I’ll see if Hannibal wants to be my boyfriend.”

Abby sits down, turns back to the TV. “Good.”

Will waits until everyone else has gone to bed. With the house quiet, he sneaks down to the living room. Approaches Winston’s bed with whispers of, “Winston. Winston. Good boy. Good dog.” The dog’s head pops up. His tail begins to swing excitedly from side to side. Will shushes him and leads him to the stairs. Winston follows Will faithfully, mounting the stairs with less than his usual speed. They tiptoe like thieves down the hallway to Will’s room, and slip inside. Will shuts the door with care.

When Will goes to his desk, Winston follows and sits, laying his head in his master’s lap. Will scratches the dog’s ears, pulls out a notebook and pen. Stares at a blank page. Winston ducks beneath the desk and curls up on Will’s feet. Will gives a tiny chuckle. Picks up the pen.

His pulse thumps loudly in his ears. All moisture fades from his mouth. The ghost of a tremor strikes his hands, making the first letters he forms a little shaky.

Hannibal, he writes. Frowns. Crosses it out. Replaces it with, *Dear Hannibal*. Frowns again. Considers. Crosses it out and reverts to, *Hannibal*.

He labors on, pen in hand, hand in hair, unsure whether to write a letter or a monologue. Curses himself and his clumsiness with words. Wishes he had even a fraction of Hannibal's grace. Not even his dog's steady presence can tame his anxiety. His thoughts bounce from one scenario to another: Hannibal hearing his words; Hannibal reading his letter. Hannibal taking him into his arms; Hannibal turning his back and walking away. Will's heart twists, sending pain radiating through his chest. He can't say which would be more terrifying.

The directive Abby has given him frightens him to his core, and he cannot understand why. There is fear of rejection, of course. If Hannibal turns away, or worse—his throat constricts—laughs at him, Will knows himself well enough to foresee the desiccating depression that will set in. Knows he will turn to a husk and blow away. And what if his request somehow angers Hannibal? He will wilt and cower in the face of that anger, shrink in on himself till he's no bigger than a marble, a new pearl, a grain of sand. Oh, there is plenty to fear.

But what if he brings Hannibal joy? A wistful ache settles high in his chest. What if Hannibal confesses that he feels the same way, takes Will into his arms, kisses him till he cries tears of happiness? Then they'll have to reveal themselves to Will's parents. Will rubs his damp palms on his pajamas. What if they don't accept it? What if his father frowns his disapproval and his mother's eyes fill with tears? He shakes his head to banish the terrible thought. But another sneaks in to replace it—even if they do accept it, they'll begin to understand. All the time spent alone together, all the nights away from his own bed, they'll at least suspect. And he cannot abide the idea that his parents' minds might turn to visions of his freshly-minted sex life.

Will sighs. Drops his head onto folded arms. His fears of a happy outcome extend past the point of telling his parents, but they tumble into an unintelligible mess. Visions of Ms. Murasaki nodding her head with a twinkle in her eye, revealing her knowledge of what has been going on under her roof all summer. Visions of blissful afternoons spoiled by petty squabbles. Visions of himself lumbering through the high-society circles in which Hannibal moves, of committing some faux pas and embarrassing himself and his boyfriend. Of being banished to some corner where he can no longer poison the air of refinement around him. Of every happiness somehow being soured.

But even beyond his fears, something else gnaws at him: does he really want to have a capital-R *Relationship* with Hannibal? Is what they have enough? Is it truly as Hannibal says—just the two of them, sharing moments together? Will takes a breath and holds it for a moment before letting it out again. Does he want more? His mind wanders, brings him images of Hannibal's eyes. He can't recall ever seeing them soft. Somehow they always seem hungry. Would a declaration of mutual affection sate that hunger? Or would possession of Will sharpen the appetite behind that gaze? He shudders.

His attraction to Hannibal is intoxicating. It is sweet as wine, warm as whiskey, it spins him around and makes him stumble, empties his head and makes the whole world dance before him. *We each drink deeply of the other*. He wants nothing more than to drink deeply of Hannibal, to guzzle him down and drink him up, to become quite drunk on him and fall into

sweet black oblivion with all of Hannibal coursing through his veins. The thought brings fire out in Will's body, sets every part aflame. But then an icy finger strokes at his heart. Is this really any different from the hunger in Hannibal's eyes? If Will stares then at his own reflection in a mirror, what kind of sharp-clawed beast would stare back?

Will grunts his frustration and sets his pen down. Winston raises his head and thumps his tail on the floor. Will pushes his chair back, slides down and lies next to his dog. Winston scoots closer and wags his tail as Will throws an arm over him. Will runs his fingers through his dog's fur, lets himself be soothed by the repetitive motion and the reassuring presence of the animal, whose unconditional love has seen Will through some of his darkest moments. "Good boy, Winston," Will whispers. "I love you, buddy." The dog licks his face playfully, and Will smiles. He sits up slowly. Looks to the bed. He would love nothing more than to fall asleep with his dog curled up on his feet, but he knows better than to break the rule about Winston sleeping in his own space. With a sigh, he leads his dog back downstairs, back to his little bed in the corner of the living room. Winston turns neat circles in his bed and lies down. Will begins petting his dog again, more to soothe himself than to settle Winston, but then Winston's head pops up and he looks over Will's shoulder.

Will whips his head around, fear thumping in his chest and throat, praying he hasn't woken one of his parents. He can't possibly explain to them what's got him up and sneaking about the house at such a late hour. He peers through the gloom and breathes a sigh of relief.

"Abby," he whispers, "what are you doing up?"

She crosses her arms. "Following you," she answers.

"Yeah, but," Will starts. Shakes his head. "Never mind. Go back to bed."

Abby remains stubbornly rooted. "How come you're up?" she asks.

Will shrugs. "Couldn't sleep."

Abby nods knowingly. "Hannibal?"

Will nods back. "Hannibal."

She takes a silent step closer. "Did you ask him?"

He looks down at Winston. Scratches the dog's ear. "Not yet."

"Will," Abby says with patience far beyond her years, "you're gonna feel bad until you do."

"I know," Will grumps. "I know. It's just..." He looks up, knowing the darkness in the house will hide some of the vulnerability in his eyes, knowing his sister will sense it anyway. "I'm scared, Abby."

Abby strides over to him, drops onto her knees, and throws her arms around him. Will hugs her back. "I don't know why you're scared," she whispers, "but I know you are. You can do this. I believe in you, Will."

Will swallows the lump rising in his throat. “Thanks, Abby.”

Abby gives him a squeeze and pulls back. Looks him full in the face. “You gotta do it tomorrow,” she instructs.

Will nods, his mouth dry, and agrees, “Tomorrow.”

“Good,” Abby says. Rises from her place on the floor. “Now go back to bed.”

Will chuckles, throws a mock salute. “Yes ma’am.” With a last look at his dog and a final ear-scratch, he gets to his feet and follows his sister back upstairs.

Alone in his room, he stands over his desk, looking down at his notebook with its scribbles and many cross-outs. He stares at it, reading back over the words and reliving the terror. But this time the fear grips less tightly. He closes the notebook. Sets his pen on top of it. Slips into bed. Thinks, *Tomorrow*.

Adieu

Chapter Summary

Will confesses his feelings for Hannibal, and gets an unexpected reaction.

Will flexes his hands, to still the trembling in his fingers. Picks up his phone, his stomach cold and his throat tight. Fearfully composes, erases, re-writes a text, just as with his notebook the night before. Finally, impatient with himself, fires off a simple, *I need to talk to you*. Waits for what seems like hours for the reply.

Finally: *Is everything all right, Will?*

Will licks his lips with a dry tongue. Debates how to explain himself. *Yeah, I just need to talk.*

Would you like to come over?

His breath judders to a halt as tremors seize his fingers again. Clumsy and agitated, he types out, *Can we meet up somewhere?*

The reply, mercifully quick: *Of course. Where would you like to meet?*

Will looks out at the overcast sky, heavy with dark clouds. *The greenway?*

A pause. Will bites his lip. The reply, *I will meet you there. 15 minutes?*

Will begins to breathe again. Texts back, *Okay*.

With the weather so gloomy, the greenway is nearly deserted. Will only sees the occasional brave runner as he waits by the entrance, leaning against a low stone wall. His head snaps up at every sound of approaching footsteps. Finally, Hannibal comes striding up, an umbrella hooked on his arm.

“Shall we walk?” Hannibal asks.

Will nods.

They move forward in silence. Hannibal seems perfectly at ease as usual, willing to let Will take his time. For Will, the silence burns. It consumes the minutes slowly as they wend their way down the path, eating up time bit by agonizing bit. Will’s heart aches fiercely; his thoughts chase each other like runaway hounds; his suppressed words well up until he feels he might burst.

Overcome, he steps off the path and begins to head into the woods. Hannibal follows a few paces behind. Will stops at a sturdy oak tree, leans his forehead against its rough trunk. Hannibal stops a few feet short of Will, gives him his space. A soft, light rain begins to fall.

Hannibal opens his umbrella. “Will?” He takes a step forward. “You’re going to get wet. Come share the umbrella with me.”

Will puts up the hood of his rain jacket and continues to lean against the tree.

Hannibal closes the distance, stands alongside Will. “You said nothing was wrong, that you just wanted to talk. Clearly something is wrong. Won’t you tell me what it is?”

Will steps away from the tree. Turns to face Hannibal, but doesn’t meet his eyes. “It’s not wrong, it’s just...” He casts about with his hands, as though he can pull the right words from the humid air. “It’s been really confusing for me, being with you, and it’s been great, and it’s been all these things, I just can’t...” He shakes his head, at a loss, fearful.

Hannibal reaches out and lays a steadying hand on Will’s shoulder. “It’s all right, Will,” he says. “I think I know what you’re trying to say.”

“No you don’t,” Will insists. Takes a deep breath. “Hannibal, I’m...” his pulse thunders in his throat, but he fights around it to push the words out. “I think I love you.”

Hannibal pauses. Removes his hand from Will’s shoulder. “Well,” he says simply, “that is unfortunate.”

A strangled noise escapes from Will. “What do you mean, unfortunate?” he cries. “*I love you.*”

“Will,” Hannibal says, his voice calm, “In a week’s time, I will be gone. I will go back to university, and you will go back to school, and our paths may not ever cross again.”

Will’s face falls. “But...but you could at least text me...”

Hannibal sighs. “What would be the point, Will?”

Anger blooms, sharp and burning, in Will’s chest. “This is fucking bullshit!” he shouts. “I just poured my heart out to you, and you’re...you’re just gonna fucking *leave?*”

Hannibal spreads his arms, seeming ruffled for the first time. “What do you want me to say, Will? What do you want me to do?”

Tears begin to streak down Will’s face. “Say you love me back!”

Hannibal’s brows draw together just a fraction. “Will, this summer has been...wonderful, and surprising, and I’ve enjoyed it so much, but—”

Will shakes his head, sending his curls whipping. “No,” he sobs, “you don’t get to do that!”

Hannibal runs a hand through his hair, exasperated. “Do you honestly think this isn’t painful for me, too?”

“No! I mean, yes! I mean...how can you just...” Will breaks down completely, folding in on himself with his hands over his face, sobbing.

Hannibal’s tone softens. “Will, please,” he says, reaching out a hand.

Will jerks away. “Don’t fucking touch me!”

“Will,” Hannibal repeats, edging closer. He sinks down with Will until they are both on their knees. Casts aside the umbrella. Puts his hand on Will’s shoulder. Draws him in. Wraps his arms around Will.

Will lashes out, beating his fists against Hannibal’s chest. Hannibal remains, accepting the blows in silence. Eventually Will runs out of steam and slumps forward, pressing his face to Hannibal’s shoulder and clinging to him like a drowning man.

Hannibal strokes Will’s hair. “I never expected to feel this way,” he admits.

“Then stay,” Will pleads.

Hannibal pulls Will closer. “I can’t.” He rests his cheek atop Will’s head. “I want to, but I can’t.”

Will’s sobs turn to hiccuping little breaths. “What do we do?”

“You’re right,” Hannibal says. “I promise I’ll stay in touch. And perhaps, if all goes well, I can visit you again.” He pulls Will back, holds him at arm’s length, looks deep into his eyes. “But Will, I want you to do something for me.”

Will nods.

“I want you to take other lovers. Broaden your experience. Don’t let me be your everything.”

Will’s face crumples. “But you *are*,” he wails.

Hannibal hugs Will close again, murmurs, “Shh, shh, it’s all right,” until he quiets. “Will, my Will,” he soothes. “My tender Will, so full of feeling.”

Will’s digs his fingers into Hannibal’s back. Gasps for breath.

Hannibal rocks Will gently. “You must trust me in this,” he says at last.

“But why?” Will demands.

Hannibal swallows hard. “We’ll be apart for so long, Will.”

Will lets go of Hannibal. “You just want to fuck other people,” he accuses. But when he pulls back and looks up, he finds tears standing in Hannibal’s eyes. He softens, contrite.

“This is not about what I want for myself,” Hannibal says. “This is about what I want for you.”

Will scrubs at his eyes with the heel of his hand. “And you want me to fuck other people.”

“I want you to experience more, Will. I’ve seen so much, done so much...I want you to have some of that as well.” Hannibal lays his hand on the back of Will’s head, looks deep into his eyes. “And Will? If I’m able to come back to you...I want you to be able to surprise me.” He draws Will forward, pulls him into a deep, lingering kiss.

Will kisses Hannibal back with fierce desperation, throws his arms around Hannibal’s neck and holds him there, begging with his body, then with his words. “Please,” he whispers, his voice ragged, “please.” Not sure what he’s even begging for, simply expressing his raw-hearted need. “Please.”

“I know,” Hannibal whispers back in between kisses. “I know.”

“I’ll text you every day,” Will says, his eyes peering into Hannibal’s.

Hannibal kisses Will’s forehead. “You must concentrate on your studies, as I must concentrate on mine. But know that even if I don’t answer right away, I’ll be thinking of you.” He strokes Will’s face. “Dreaming of you.”

“Me too.” Will sighs. Sniffles. “Why does this have to be so hard?”

Hannibal rests his hand on the back of Will’s neck. “Loving another person is not easy, Will. It takes work.”

Will wipes his eyes. “Yeah. I’ve heard that before.”

Hannibal cups Will’s chin, runs his thumb across Will’s cheek. “Are you prepared to live it?”

Will swallows. “I’ll try.”

The corners of Hannibal’s mouth lift. “Good. I will try as well. Now,” he takes Will’s hand and gets to his feet, “let’s go back.”

“Okay.” Will gets up. Brushes debris from his knees with his free hand. He moves to release Hannibal’s hand, but Hannibal’s grip remains firm. Will looks up, locks eyes with Hannibal.

Hannibal lifts Will’s hand and kisses it. Brings it back down, gives it a squeeze, then laces their fingers together. Picks up the fallen umbrella and holds it over both of them.

He holds Will’s hand all the way back to the car.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

A winter afternoon brings Will more than he expected.

Will doffs his coat at the door. Hangs it in the coat closet. Takes off his snow-crusting boots and sets them on the drip tray. Pushes his feet into the slippers that wait next to the tray. Abby comes bounding in behind him, begins to run straight for the kitchen. Remembers her boots and coat and takes them off. Will puts them away for her. Heads to the kitchen, where their mother is already prepping for their traditional beginning-of-winter-break cookie baking.

“Hi, kids!” she calls as they enter. “Who’s ready to make cookies?”

“Where’s my apron?” Abby asks, eager. She spies it hanging on a peg, and retrieves it, begs Will, “Tie the back for me.”

Will indulges her. Turns toward the stairs.

Mrs. Graham leans back until she can see him around the corner. “Will? Where are you going?”

Will hooks a thumb toward his room. “Just gonna change right quick.”

“Okay. Oh—you got some mail. It’s on the counter.”

Will nods. More junk, likely. He’s been flooded with credit card offers since he turned eighteen, but his parents let him evaluate them before throwing them away, if he wants. Spotting terrible offers, they’ve told him, is a part of financial literacy.

In his room, he shrugs out of his jeans and sweater. Puts on a long-sleeved shirt and a pair of lounge pants. Checks his phone. Still nothing. He heaves a sigh and heads back downstairs.

Back in the kitchen, he picks up his pile of mail. Just as he suspected—junk.

But then.

A small envelope, the size of a birthday card. Heavy, creamy paper. Something so fine he feels he should be handling it with gloves. He turns it over. His name, in elegant calligraphy. No postmark, no stamp, no return address. “Mom, what is...?”

She turns and looks. “I don’t know, sweetheart. It was just in the mailbox.” She smiles. “Open it and find out.”

With trembling fingers, Will opens the envelope, feeling ghastly for tearing the fine paper. Inside, a plain card, lettered in the same handsome calligraphy. Will nearly drops it when he reads:

Hannibal Lecter requests the pleasure of your company for dinner.

Today's date.

Will tears out of the kitchen. "Will?" his mother calls after him. "Where are you going?"

"Be right back," Will fires over his shoulder as he jams his boots back on. To hell with his coat. Flings the door wide. Shuts it hastily behind him, and bolts across the porch, down the steps, the sidewalk, the walkway next door, up to the door, the blessed door. Rings the doorbell.

Footsteps.

A hand on the latch.

Will's breath plumes out, his heart leaping in his chest as the door opens.

His eyes fill with tears. "Hannibal."

Hannibal, beaming, beatific, beautiful. "Will."

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!